

Chanhassen's 'Camelot' so good it'll make you cry

By Graydon Royce, Star Tribune Staff Writer, Sunday, October 27, 2002

A companion snuffled back tears as she asked on the way out of Chanhassen Theatre's opening of "Camelot" on Friday night: "Where did they get that guy?"

Not a theater regular, she can be forgiven for not recognizing Steve Hendrickson, who has practiced his craft on many Twin Cities stages. But her curiosity spoke for the many patrons who had moments earlier jumped to their feet to applaud Hendrickson's brilliant portrayal of the complex, tormented King Arthur in Lerner and Loewe's musical meditation on chivalry, love, idealistic peace and above all, nobility.

It is that essential decency in Hendrickson's Arthur that explains the moist cheeks in the theater; he is a forgiving man who perseveres through life's depredations and never gives in to the dark side, even when his wife and best friend abandon him.

Fate thrusts on Arthur a destiny he did not court, though he shoulders it with weary bravery. He thinks too much, feels too much, cares too much. That anguish, though, produces a Round Table, where knights might settle disputes and avoid war.

"Camelot" has some clunky dramaturgical problems, and its score doesn't approach Lerner and Loewe's master work, "My Fair Lady," but in many ways it compensates with a story drenched in mysterious and mythic power, vividly illustrated at Chanhassen by Nayna Ramey's spooky set. It's all fire, water, sky, trees and earth—the primitive elements that inform director Michael Brindisi's Dark Ages conception.



Steve Hendrickson, a veteran of Twin Cities stages, gave a brilliant interpretation of the tormented, complex King Arthur in Chanhassen's *Camelot*.

Brindisi uses this palette to construct gorgeous stage tableaux, and Michael Matthew Ferrell's choreography has a loose mirth that nonetheless retains a sense of order



Review: Steve Hendrickson is brilliant as the noble King Arthur and Brindisi's staging is superb.

and symmetry. Sandra Nei Schulte's costumes and Sue Ellen Berger's lights complete a stunning vision.

As Arthur's queen, Norah Long lights up the stage with a saucy Guenevere, alive with vivacious voice and spirit. She and Hendrickson have crackling chemistry, and it is easy to see how Guenevere still loves her king even after the passion is wrung out of their relationship.

One example of Long's marvelous stage presence: her eyes betray the precise moment when Guenevere's disgust with the boorish Lancelot clicks over to beguilement. "Who is this guy?" they say.

Well, truth be told, he's sort of a doofus. Though Keith Rice looks and sings every bit the sterling champion with his flashing sword and air of invincibility, he struggles with a French accent (better to just drop it) and he falls victim to the script's greatest flaw—it never sufficiently shows how and why this righteous rock cracks and falls in love with Guenevere.

Henry Gardner finds the wise whimsy in tottering old Pellinore, and Tony Vierling cuts a delicious and cunning portrait as Mordred, the bastard son who takes down Arthur's Round Table dreams

Which gets us back to Hendrickson's poignant, vulnerable performance as a tragic and reluctant hero who wished only to love his wife and make peace. It's enough to make one weep.