



This 'Winter's Tale' dazzles, even in spring

Graydon Royce, May 6, 2004

It seemed right on a sunny May day to consider "The Winter's Tale," which finds William Shakespeare at his warm, redemptive best. Ten Thousand Things has been touring a sleek version of the play, and Monday afternoon found the troupe in an open lobby at Metropolitan Community College in Minneapolis. As students studied along windows or power-napped in soft chairs, a small crowd drifted through to watch Shakespeare's late-life meditation on the restorative balm of time.

By mixing death's rueful sting with the tonic of pastoral relief, Shakespeare gave early form to the tragicomedy. To the mystification of early critics, he also stirred time, place, religion and structure -- using whatever convention suited the moment. Costumer Sonya Berlovitz, tasked with delineating 15 characters with six actors, takes a cue from this anachronistic vision. Initially nonplussed, one can either choose to accept fedoras and trenchcoats alongside Elizabethan collars as a necessary convenience, or not.

Shakespeare centers his story on Leontes, king of Sicilia. A proud, abrupt man, he needs little provocation to accuse his wife, Hermione, of adultery with his childhood friend, the King of Bohemia. Actor Steve Hendrickson beautifully develops Leontes in these early scenes. With a vacant glance, a stare, a slight grimace or a slouch, Hendrickson rolls out Leontes' slow burn. He spins himself to an insanity built on self-deluded confidence, challenging his courtiers to accuse him of jealous caprice.

Bohemia escapes with the help of



Leontes' confidant, but poor Hermione is sent to prison, where she births a daughter. Though the oracle of Apollo exonerates the accused, the king rejects the verdict and secures his reward: Hermione falls stricken, their son dies from the shock of his mother in prison and Leontes banishes the daughter. He retreats in agony.

Shakespeare leaps 16 years to find the young girl, Perdita, raised by shepherds, in love with Bohemia's son, Florizell. Now it is Bohemia's turn to rage against his flesh, excoriating the prince for descending from his social position. Perdita and Florizell flee back to Sicilia, where Leontes embraces them, discovering his daughter's fate. The greatest reclamation, though, comes in a final scene full of forgiveness and hope.

Director Tracy Young's production is swiftly paced, well articulated and, thanks to Peter Vitale's indispensable soundscape, transparent in reflecting the swing in Shakespeare's mood. Matt Guidry finds Bohemia's good heart

as well as his anger, and he brightly animates the role of Autolycus, the thief. Marie-Francoise Theodore carries Hermione's grace and innocence as though it were her own and Kate Eifrig's Paulina scorches Leontes' stupidity with caustic acid. The one weakness emanates from Aimee Bryant's portrayal of Perdita. It is solid, but it lacks a radiance or presence that the text seems to call for with its recitation of her character. She never commands the stage, embodying the cheer of spring to counterbalance Leontes' winter melancholia.

What: By William Shakespeare. Directed by Tracy Young for Ten Thousand Things Theatre.

Review: A fine, sleek production of Shakespeare's redemptive story.