

Tempest

Perchance Theatre

Director Danielle Irvine introduces the performance as a remount of the successful run in 2022, a kind of continuity linking the former Perchance location with the new home in Conception Harbour. It is that and more.

Jodee Richardson (Prospero) works in splendid harmony with Erika Squires (Ariel) and Claire Donnan (Miranda) to represent the (more or less) harmonious enchantment of the island. Prospero is always in control, but he does not find everything easy. This is not a magician of the flourishing, self-aggrandizing sort. Prospero must struggle with his art, in this production the principal reason for the frequency of his reference to it. The magic may be externalized—the cloak, the staff, the book—but the cost of its use is emotional and internal. Squires manages the unenviable task of being at once on stage and invisible with brio. Ariel moves with enthusiasm, dignity, and great playfulness—sometimes all at once. Donnan is entirely plausible as a child of Richardson's—great 'family' casting—and she balances very carefully among the lines connecting ignorance, naiveté, and being a teenager, producing a figure who is believable in her awed reaction to the “brave new world” yet worthy of her father's categorization of her as his “more braver daughter.”

Blake Pyne (Caliban) is more than adequately less than human. I am enough of a sufficiently Old (if not Dead) White Cis Male to still consider Caliban as a kind of beast, as the 17th century would conceive the child of a devil and a witch to be, a would-be rapist and murderer, in short not really the icon of postcolonial indigeneity that he has become over the last 50 years. Pyne's movement (in 2022 I called it a “flither”—a flow/slither combination) reminds the audience of the character's subhuman elements, yet also of the sensitivity of spirit which can lament being forced awake from dreaming, someone who attempts to calm his hilarious “false gods,” the wine-skinned wastrels Stephano (Sarah Conway) and Trinculo (Michael Nolan) with reference to the “noises, sounds and sweet airs” of the isle.

The Italian court, King Alonso (Paul Rowe), well-intentioned social leveller Gonzalo (Selina Asgar), Prospero's usurping brother Antonio (Colin Furlong), and Alonso's envious brother Sebastian (Una Hill-McMullin), wander in uniform through the tattered landscape. Alonso's postured despair is usually offset by Gonzalo's hopeful idealism, and the plotting of the disrespectful brothers parallels on the 'society' level the Caliban-inspired assassination attempt on Prospero by Trinculo and Stephano. Owen Carter's Ferdinand rounds out the cast, youthful, enthusiastic, a good worker, an honest chap—everything a prince should be and, still more important, in the rhetoric of the original era anyway, everything Miranda deserves in a husband.

The technical elements of the show (especially the storms and the hauntings) are excellent. The soundscape and music (Jodee Richardson, with Nicole Hand) is a kind of 'surround sound' experience, especially the songs of Ariel and of the Goddesses in the wedding masque, which are ethereal. The cast uses the entire theatre, not merely the thrust of the main stage, and the set design (Alison Helmer) incorporates appearances on several levels. Physical comedy and timing are excellent, especially in conveying the magic which the plot demands.

This is a production which shows us "all the qualities o' the isle" and leaves us with the taste of "some subtleties o' the isle" to linger as we return to our brave old world.