Eliot Dix

Theater 101-02

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How I Saw Longwood’s Production of “The Tempest”

Upon entering the theater, I was greeted warmly by the set, which consisted of pink and purple hues. A womb-like cavernous arch way served as the architectural frame that made the stage a proscenium. A series of circles, some concentric, staggered in height, created a multi level surface for the actors to perform. This functioned well to indicate the various decks of a ship during the opening scene, and was used to keep Prospero and his mysterious magic ‘above’ the other characters. The actor portraying Prospero, Mathew Carly, is already a figure of imposing stature, using the heightened portions of the stage emphasise the control he has on the island. Creatively, the crew decided to utilize the aisles between sections, as they imposed another entrance to the stage through the audience. I was thoroughly amused by this unusual addition, and it reminded me of something Shakespeare may have appreciated. Without any scenery changes, more emphasis is placed on the performers to verbally invent the idea of the environment they’re in. I thought this was well done by the cast, directed by Scott C. Chapman. My only complaint, (the cause of which may be my own on account of sitting in the back), would be my inability to see actors lying on the floor. One certain scene that received major positive feedback from the audience was Stephano, played by Mathew Howard, drunkenly stumbles upon the ‘monster’ under the cloak. Unfortunately I was in a blindspot for the visual nature of this scene.

The Audio was powerful in this production of “The Tempest.” Loud, ear piercing thunder claps made me stirr in my seat. The storm scene was a prominent example of successful audio and visual effects. A strobe light was used, along with a gobo pattern that seemed vaguely reminiscent of rough ocean water. There was also a loud electronic dance song to further emphasise the commotion and frantic actions of the crew members. Another strong audio moment was the dog barks in the middle of act two. As actors flew by wearing muzzles, vicious barks rang out, echoing about the theater. They were also well timed with comedic reactions to their frequency by the cast.

The attire of the actors overall accomplished their goals of setting the period, however they had a certain feel of being unrelated stock costumes that loosely adhere to the era. The crew members of the ship were wearing decorated military uniforms, an addition to the characters that wasn’t really referenced or discussed. I thought the grey morph suit Ariel wore left a little to be desired. It certainly separated her as ‘not human,’ but it seemed like a missed opportunity to do something more mystical and visually appealing.

This production of “The Tempest,” was the first that I’ve seen, and I’d say it left me wanting to see another version. Not that this one wasn’t satisfactory, I just wonder what additional budgetary advantages would do to this production. Granted in the day it was written, the emphasis was on the actors to portray all of the impossible modern day special effects, so I can appreciate its authenticity for that reason. I thought the actors’ diction was good, however at times I felt a little bit mislead by their inflection. In the future I’d sit closer, to guarantee a better line of site for everything the production offers. I’d describe this show as genuine, and solid. I particularly enjoyed the performances of Mathew Howard (Stephano/Antonio), and Mathew Carley (Prospero).