



Stratford's Breath of Kings Rallies Forces through Redemption

by Jim Volz. Written on 2016-08-23. Published in 2017 Issue 1.

For the production: *Breath of Kings: Redemption* (2016, Stratford Festival of Canada, Canada). See production details at the end of the review.

SHAKESPEARE'S *HENRY THE FOURTH, PART 2* IS ALWAYS A BIT OF A DRUDGE LACKING BOTH THE humor, blood, and guts passion of *Henry the Fourth, Part 1*. Still, Canada's Stratford Festival plunged into Graham Abbey's adaptation titled *Breath of Kings: Redemption* and offered a palatable *Henry the Fourth, Part 2* followed by a palpable *Henry the Fifth*.

In their "The Head that Wears a Crown" directors' notes, Weyni Mengesha and Mitchell Cushman offered striking reasons for tackling the two Henrys at this particular time: "What compels someone to seek a throne (be it situated inside a castle, an Oval Office, or a boardroom), and what should we demand from those who sit upon them? Today, it is impossible to contemplate Richard, Henry, and Hal without considering Trudeau and Obama, Trump, Clinton and Sanders, Putin and Merkel, and Gaddafi, and Mubarak, and the Koch brothers"

For the politically astute, the parallels were uncanny. Abbey as King Henry the Fourth, Araya Mengesha as Prince Hal, and the rest of the Royal Family were rightfully wary of the rebels' power in the guise of the Archbishop of York and Lady Percy (both played by an agile Carly Street), Young Mowbray (Mikaela Davies), Lord Hasting (Anusree Roy), the Earl of Northumberland (Nigel Shawn Williams), and Lady Northumberland (Irene Poole). The somber play certainly challenged the audience to consider the consequences of ambition, suspicion, revenge, and deadly politics, and although Falstaff's bravado (admirably rendered by Geraint Wyn Davies) provided temporary relief, his eventual humiliation was made bearable only in contrast to the redemption and future promise of King Henry the Fifth.

As Prince Hal/Henry the Fifth, Mengesha came into his own as he ascended the throne and *Breath of Kings: Redemption* transitioned from Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth, Part 2* into Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*. Fortunately, both the pace and the action picked up in the second

half of this adaptation as King Charles the Sixth of France (Wayne Best), Queen Isabel (Roy), The Dauphin (Davies), the Duke of Orleans (Shane Carty), and the rest of the French contingent offered enough bluster and bravado to resurrect audience interest and plunge the players into battle.

The Battle of Agincourt was creatively staged in the round (unusual for Stratford's Tom Patterson Theater), and the directing, design, and fight team's ingenuity rivalled that of the outnumbered English and the miraculous defeat of the overconfident French. Anahita Dehbonehie's set design provided myriad battle formations as pieces of the stage were pried up from the floor and used as shelter or vantage points. Yannik Larivée's costume design ranged from odd to ingenious to helpful as the audience sorted out the many doublings of actors, the women playing men's roles, and the back and forth appearances of the Royal Family, English officers, and French nobility and soldiers. Kimberly Purtell's intricate lighting design and Debashis Sinha's dynamic work as a composer and sound designer were crucial to clarifying each army's strategic plans, advances, engagements, and triumphs. Fight Director John Stead and Movement Director Brad Cook deserved special mention for the complex, polished, and provocative choreography and battle scenes.

Breath of Kings, Rebellion and Redemption, represented a wildly ambitious undertaking and commitment by Stratford Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino, and company. Although some scenes proved long and challenging, *Breath of Kings* was definitely more than the sum of its parts, and the experience of those four Shakespeare plays over two productions and six hours was more than worth it for the bravest of the Bard's followers and a rare, rich experience for both audience and company members alike.

Jim Volz is an international arts consultant, author, producer, and professor based in Orange County at California State University, Fullerton. He served as a longtime critic/arts columnist for New York's Back Stage and founding editor of the Shakespeare Theatre Association's international magazine, Quarto. He has produced over 100 professional productions, consulted for over 100 arts institutions and published more than 100 articles on management, arts criticism, Shakespeare, and theatre in American Theatre, Oxford University Press's Theatre Research International, Hollywood's Drama-Logue and myriad other articles for national and international publications. He is a Ph.D. graduate from the University of Colorado, Boulder. jvolz@fullerton.edu

Production Details

General

<i>Title</i>	Breath of Kings: Redemption
<i>Year</i>	2016
<i>Theater Company</i>	Stratford Festival of Canada
<i>Theaters</i>	Tom Patterson Theatre (Canada)
<i>Start Date</i>	2016-06-22
<i>End Date</i>	2016-09-24

Cast

KING HENRY	GRAHAM ABBEY
BATES	GRAHAM ABBEY
KING CHARLES	WAYNE BEST
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY	WAYNE BEST
DUKE OF ORLEANS	SHANE CARTY
NYM	SHANE CARTY
PETER BULLCALF	SHANE CARTY
YOUNG MOWBRAY	MIKAELA DAVIES
PRINCESS KATHERINE	MIKAELA DAVIES
SIMON SHADOW	MIKAELA DAVIES
THE DAUPHIN	MIKAELA DAVIES
MONTJOY	MICHELLE GIROUX
DOLL TEARSHEET	MICHELLE GIROUX
PRINCE JOHN	SEBASTIEN HEINS
RALPH MOULDY	SEBASTIEN HEINS
MONSIEUR LE FER	SEBASTIEN HEINS
CAPTAIN GOWER	KATE HENNIG
MISTRESS QUICKLY	KATE HENNIG
ANCIENT PISTOL	RANDY HUGHSON
DAVY GAM	BRENT MCCREADY-BRANCH
KING HENRY	ARAYA MENGESHA
PRINCE HAL	ARAYA MENGESHA
UNDERSTUDY	PARKER MERLIHAN
ALICE	IRENE POOLE
LADY NORTHUMBERLAND	IRENE POOLE
LORD CHIEF JUSTICE	IRENE POOLE
CHORUS	TOM ROONEY

JUSTICE SHALLOW	TOM ROONEY
BEADLE	ANUSREE ROY
LORD HASTINGS	ANUSREE ROY
QUEEN ISABEL	ANUSREE ROY
JUSTICE SILENCE	STEPHEN RUSSELL
EARL OF WESTMORELAND	STEPHEN RUSSELL
FRANCES FEEBLE	GORDON S. MILLER
CONSTABLE OF FRANCE	GORDON S. MILLER
NED POINS	GORDON S. MILLER
PRINCE HUMPHREY	GORDON S. MILLER
WILLIAMS	JOHNATHAN SOUSA
PRINCE THOMAS OF CLARENCE	JOHNATHAN SOUSA
LADY PERCY	CARLY STREET
ARCHBISHOP OF YORK	CARLY STREET
BARDOLPH	NIGEL SHAWN WILLIAMS
EARL OF NORTHUMBERLAND	NIGEL SHAWN WILLIAMS
DUKE OF EXETER	NIGEL SHAWN WILLIAMS
JOHN FALSTAFF	GERAINT WYN DAVIES
CAPTAIN FLUELLEN	GERAINT WYN DAVIES

Creatives

DIRECTOR	MITCHELL CUSHMAN
DIRECTOR	WEYNI MENGESHA
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	PETER PASYK
COSTUME DESIGNER	YANNIK LARIVÉE
SET DESIGNER	ANAHITA DEHBONEHIE
LIGHTING DESIGNER	KIMBERLY PURTELL
SOUND DESIGNER	DEBASHIS SINHA
COMPOSER	DEBASHIS SINHA
FIGHT DIRECTOR	JOHN STEAD
STAGE MANAGER	JUDY FARTHING
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	KATHERINE ARCUS
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	ZEPH WILLIAMS
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER	JANINE RALPH
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER	MAXWELL T. WILSON
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR	GRAHAM ABBEY
ADAPTOR	GRAHAM ABBEY
CONCEIVER	GRAHAM ABBEY
ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER	C.J. ASTRONOMO

ASSISTANT COSTUME DESIGNER	FRANCESCA CALLOW
ASSISTANT COSTUME DESIGNER	CAITLIN LUXFORD
APPRENTICE STAGE MANAGER	GREGORY MCLAUGHLIN
ASSOCIATE FIGHT DIRECTOR	GEOFF SCOVELL