



## Strong Leads Drive Shakespeare by the Sea's King Lear

by Robert Lilly. Written on 2011-08-19. First published in the *ISE Chronicle*.

For the production: King Lear (2011, Shakespeare by the Sea, Los Angeles, USA).

STAGED OUTSIDE AND TOURING MORE THAN 40 LOCATION ACROSS CALIFORNIA SHAKESPEARE by the Sea takes on an epic task, and succeeds well. Director Stephanie Coltrin conducts a rapid and emotional King Lear. Performed outside and against the elements this show demands a high energy and good tech support. While the costumes and at times the sound left something to be desired, this show was delivered at a fever pitch and had the audience audibly gasping at its tragic conclusion.

The stage stands tall and is impressive in both size and detail. The company sets it up and breaks it down each night and audiences may come and view the quick and efficient work of the cast and crew to assemble the massive wood structure capped by a looming thunder sheet with a celtic crest reaching skyward. They may also observe the actor warm ups and mic tests along with the daunting fight call undertaken by the actors before each show in a nightly ritual. In Newport the crowd appeared to be near 1000 which is about what I have come to expect over the past few seasons from Shakespeare by the Sea supporters.

David Graham (King Lear), a veteran performer with the company is strong as Lear but it is the quartet of Graham's Lear along with Cordelia (Katie Pelensky) , loving daughter to Lear, the Earl of Kent (Andrew David James) Lear's constant and devoted servant, and Edgar (Drew Shirley) the betrayed hero of the play, that give King Lear its heart. Graham runs the gambit of emotions demanded by the role and compels the audience to watch him every moment he is on the stage. Likewise, the striking Pelensky offers a sensitive and heart wrenching portrayal of a daughter wronged. James' Kent is bold, cinematic and vulnerable, bearing every injustice his master must suffer with equal forbearance. Shirley's Edgar balances Lear's decent into madness with an evenly delivered fall from glory and eventual return. Other strong performances are given by the evil Goneril (Suzanne Dean) and the cast as a whole who, almost without exception, play this fast paced production to the hilt.

This production was produced with a Celtic undertone and the devotion detail stood out both in the direction, acting, and the production as a whole. Shakespeare by the Sea 2011 also offers *Much Ado About Nothing* this year.