



Orlando Shakespeare Cymbeline Offers Clarity, Hilarity, and Drama

by Jim Volz. Written on 2012-03-17. First published in the *ISE Chronicle*.

For the production Cymbeline (2012, Orlando Shakespeare Theater in Partnership with UCF, USA).

FORTY YEARS OF CHASING PRODUCTIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S SELDOM PRODUCED, GENRE-defying plays means that this reviewer jumps when Cymbeline pops up and a clear and edifying Orlando Shakespeare Theater production was worth the cross-country trip. Whereas Southern California boasts over a dozen Shakespeare companies, Central Florida only has one visionary company of international note committed to the Bard—but it is a beauty. Working in partnership with the University of Central Florida, Orlando Shakespeare has transitioned over 23 years from a playful band shelter on the bank of the city's Lake Eola to the lovely Lowndes Shakespeare Center at Loch Haven Park.

Helmed by OST Artistic Director Jim Helsinger, Cymbeline is passionate, clever, and, at times, laugh out loud funny. Who knew? Adeptly playing the revelatory randomness of Shakespeare's sometimes absurd plotting, the company manages to make sense and a marvelous night of theatre out of this puzzle of play.

There's not a weak link in the cast. Wynn Harmon is a formidable Cymbeline and Carey Urban is persuasive and compelling as Imogen. The queen's son, Cloten, is played with panache as an ill-shaped, gremlinesque idiot by Brandon Roberts and Megan Pickrell delivers revelatory punch line after punch line with impeccable timing as Doctor Cornelius. Johnny Lee Davenport, Anne Hering, Geoffrey Kent, Michael Raven, David Hardie, Michael Shenefelt, Sam Little, Bradford B. Frost, Amanda Leakey, Ryan Czerwonko, Stella Heath, Kraig Kesley and Rudy Roushdi drive the play forward, connect the plots and embrace and enhance the play's bizarre turns by playing it straight and committing to a character-by-character focus on ensemble.

Cymbeline in not an easy play to stage, design or swallow. Geoffrey Kent cleanly choreographs the fights with purity and power and Bob Phillips' scene design provides atmosphere and room to move. The show is well lit by Bert Scott and Denise Warner's costume design is well-suited to the part-legend, part-history nature of Cymbeline. Finally, Matthew Given successfully meets

the sometimes bizarre sound oddities of Cymbeline (including the often-cut bizarreness of Jupiter's lightning bolts).

The audience for the March 1, 2012 production of Cymbeline was an interesting blend of international Shakespeare producers, season subscribers and many of the theatre's core board members who have helped build this community jewel. The production followed a splendid performance the night before by former Royal Shakespeare Company member and Tony Award-winner Roger Rees called *What You Will: An Evening By and About the Bard*.

Why one of America's premiere LORT theatres hasn't grabbed hold of Artistic Director Jim Helsinger is beyond me. Well into his 2nd decade in Orlando, Helsinger has created one of the most successful theatre operations in America, added a new play component (always a favorite of theatres seeking to bolster their national profile), and built an institution and community partnership that rivals the best of the USA's nonprofit theatres. For now, three of the best kept secrets in regional theatre (Orlando Shakespeare Theatre Company/Jim Helsinger/Committed Board leadership) is Florida's gain and a rare look at Cymbeline is an adventure worth taking.

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