



## Schiller's *Mary Stuart* Satisfies in Utah Shakespeare Opening Performance

by Jim Volz. Written on 2012-07-03. First published in the *ISE Chronicle*.

For the production: *Mary Stuart* (2012, Utah Shakespeare Festival, USA).

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER WOULD NO DOUBT BE AMUSED THAT HIS 1800 TALE OF TWO QUEENS, (FIRST produced in Weimar, Germany), has been resurrected, revised and re-produced in England's tiny, but revered Donmar Warehouse, London's West End, Broadway's Broadhurst Theatre and now, the Adams Shakespearean Theatre in Cedar City, Utah.

The play's pivotal, fuming, face-to-face meeting between England's Queen Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots is pure fiction—but riveting drama. Indeed, the play is based on the stirring historical rivalry between the two queens and their battle over religion, politics and the right to rule England. Elizabeth (daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn), ascended to the throne in 1558, rejected Catholicism and ruled a Protestant England (thus creating many Catholic enemies loyal to Mary Queen of Scots). Mary challenged Elizabeth for the throne of England, failed and was imprisoned.

This new Peter Oswald version of *MARY STUART* stays close to Schiller and history while shrewdly delving inside the minds of both queens to explore the personal motives, political machinations and sexual intrigue that link them to the same man (Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester) and their inevitable destinies. Queen Elizabeth's quandary is whether it is wise to order Mary's execution or find another device that's less likely to incite the wrath of Mary's supporters. Mary's fatal flaw is her fiery temper and self-righteous indignation. When these two queens meet, egos soar, sparks fly and fates are sealed.

Monica Bell is wonderfully cold and calculating as a Queen Elizabeth hell bent on finding a way to kill the Scottish queen without suffering guilt pangs of conscience or more serious political consequences. As Mary Stuart, Jacqueline Antaramian handles the difficult transition from submissive prisoner begging for her life to abused, privileged queen deprived of her rightful throne with power and panache. Martin Kildare is convincingly daring and determined as the ill-fated Earl of Leicester and the large ensemble of Elizabeth and/or Mary supporters are solid

from the secretary of state (Michael A. Harding) to the nurse (Leslie Brott) to the array of guards and officers. Dan Frezza (Talbot), Dan Kremer (Cecil) and John G. Preston (envoy extraordinary of France) are especially engaging.

Director Kate Buckley paces the piece with a steady hand, foregoes gimmickry and special effects, and lets the words work their magic. The show is beautifully costumed by Bill Black, Robert Mark Morgan's scene design is simple and effective and Donna Ruzika adds nice touches and carefully lights the production as the sun fades and the moon rises over the summer audience in the Outdoor Adams Shakespearean Theatre. Along with the actors, Philip Thompson receives kudos as Voice and Text Coach for the clarity and consistency of the speech and understandability of the text.

One final note—the mutual hatred among the English and Scottish Queen is so intensely well-played and palpable that the audience was visibly jarred when the actresses embraced as they left the stage following a rousing standing ovation. This is exciting theatre and one of the few Friedrich Schiller plays to be produced on an American professional stage this year.

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