



Original Practices Henry the Fourth, Part 2 Hailed as Valiant First Effort for Colorado Shakespeare

by Jim Volz. Written on 2014-08-17. First published in the *ISE Chronicle*.

For the production: Henry IV, Part II (2014, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, USA).

AS PART OF AN EXPERIMENT IN WORKING WITH ORIGINAL PRACTICES, THE 57TH SEASON OF Colorado Shakespeare Festival included a *Henry IV, Part II* conclusion to the company's fully staged *Henry IV, Part I* for three Sunday performances. This unique CSF staging included only five days of rehearsal, a prompter, many key actors with just a "cue script" in hand, universal lighting, a hodge-podge of modern dress and period costumes, and a generally collective direction of the piece by the acting company.

Producing Artistic Director Timothy Orr welcomed audiences and explained a bit about original Elizabethan theatre staging practices, how original practices have been interpreted by various companies in recent years, and the adventure that Colorado Shakespeare embarked on for this production.

Fortunately, for many company members, the production most likely benefitted significantly from the casting, character development, rehearsal period and ensemble work that was put into *Henry IV, Part I*, and Michael Winters once again led the way on stage as an amiable, boastful, poignantly pathetic Sir John Falstaff. The story of King Henry IV's maladies and death, the odd misunderstanding with his son, Hal, Prince John's questionable integrity and Falstaff's eventual humiliation is sobering drama under the best of circumstances and the CSF company manages to make sense of the piece—but it was a long process. A number of actors seemed to struggle (borrowing from Peter Quince) with "cues and all." The result was a much longer than the promised fast and light pacing keeping to "the two hours' traffic of our stage."

Still, kudos to a fine company of actors and congratulations to an artistic and production team for risking public performances under experimental conditions. Although the results of the "final product" were mixed, many actors rose to the challenge and the production was no doubt an interesting artistic experiment for the company and an educational journey for the audience.

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