

FEATURES

Review

London Actors Perform "The Winter's Tale"

Mason Currey

Staff Writer

The Actors from the London Stage performed William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale" April 4 in Lipinsky Auditorium, employing an innovative approach to create a uniformly excellent production.

"I thought it was an impressive performance by extremely talented actors," said Ray Williams, a junior computer science major.

The performance was sponsored by the UNCA Cultural and Special Events Performing Arts Series, in association with the University of Notre Dame.

It featured a unique approach to Shakespeare by utilizing simple costumes, an austere set design and a bare minimum of props.

The stage itself was decorated with only a few wooden crates and some candles.

The costumes were particularly interesting; rather than wearing imitations of period costumes, the actors were dressed in more contemporary clothing, including blue jeans and leather jackets.

The overall effect of this unassuming approach to costumes and stage design was to highlight the acting as well as Shakespeare's language itself.

"Using subtle gestures, body movements, and voice modulation rather than elaborate costumes or sets, this cast conveys all the action and shifts of character with ease and believability," said the press release.

The cast of the Actors from the London Stage consists of Doyne Byrd, Mairead Carty, Andrew Readman, Alison Skilbeck and Nicholas Tigg.

Tigg also composed the music featured in the production, a number of short, humorous tunes played on ukelele or mandolin.

Since the play featured a good deal more than five characters, each actor played multiple roles.

In fact, at times actors were even forced to play more than one role at a time.



JUSTUS D'ADDARIO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Actors From the London Stage performed William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale" in Lipinsky Auditorium April 4. The five-member ensemble used few sets and modernized costumes. At first, the performance was disorienting as the actors began playing different roles, sometimes within the same scene.

While this technique was initially a little disorienting, it quickly became an interesting, effective and often amusing method of including the numerous secondary characters in the play.

Fortunately, all of the members of the troupe are experienced, accomplished actors and their work in this performance was consistently of the highest quality.

Even when acting scenes that required them to, in effect, talk to themselves, they pulled it off with

aplomb. The production, then, only benefited from the relatively simple approach to staging.

"In the simplicity lies the magic. In the simplicity lies the heart of Shakespeare's gift to us all. So, we do not seduce you or distract you with an operatic spectacular. We do not confine you or Shakespeare in the tiny world of a director's or a designer's concept," said Homer Swander, the founder of the Actors from the London Stage, in the program note.

"We believe in the play, in the power of Shakespeare's words in performance, and in the rich possibilities created by the imaginations of the participating audience," said Swander in the program note.

As for the play itself, it is one of Shakespeare's late comedies, "an example of the mature handiwork of Shakespeare in one of his most unique and subtle romances," according to the press release. "Magical statues, wild bears, young

lovers, and jealous raging tyrants all combine to make this one of Shakespeare's most entertaining and memorable plays, as well as a audience favorite," said the press release. The plot revolves around Leontes, the king of Sicilia, whose uncontrollable jealousy motivates him to commit a string of cruelties against friends and family members. Early in the play, Leontes suspects his wife, Hermione, of committing adultery with the visiting king, Polixenes.

Enraged by this thought, Leontes attempts unsuccessfully to have Polixenes poisoned and locks Hermione in prison.

Despite the unsteady factual basis for his suspicions, this is only the beginning of Leontes' misguided actions.

Not only does he refuse to release Hermione upon the sickness of her son, Mamillius, but he takes her newborn daughter and orders that she be abandoned in the wilderness.

While Hermione continues to languish in confinement, Leontes stands trial for his actions before the oracle at Delphi.

Yet, even the oracle's declaration of Hermione's innocence fails to bring the enraged ruler to his senses.

Only when he learns of Prince Mamillius' death does Leontes finally realize the error of his actions, but by that time it is too late—Hermione dies almost immediately after the death of her son.

For what is supposed to be a comedy, this first part of the play is actually quite serious and even bleak, containing only a few comic moments. The second half of the performance, however, introduced a number of amusing characters and situations, adding a welcome degree of levity to the production.

The latter portion of the play begins after the abandoned princess, Perdita, is discovered by an old shepherd, who decides to raise her as his own daughter.

16 years later, Perdita's involvement with the son of Polixenes brings about the eventual redemption of the devastated, penitent Leontes, wrapping up the play with a satisfyingly happy conclusion.

Of course, this gross oversimplification of the plot does not nearly do justice to the play's intricate story line; neither does it take into account the central importance of poetic language in a Shakespeare's work.

The actors, on the other hand, demonstrated an impressive grasp of the rhythm and cadences of Shakespeare's words, bringing the bard's verse to life and making the nearly three hour performance fly by.

Review

"Spy Kids" a Typical Espionage Flick

Orin Shepherd

Staff Writer

Robert Rodriguez' new movie, "Spy Kids" is a cool high-tech film that is a fun beginning to the summer adventure movie rush.

If the Oscar season has made you weary "Spy Kids" is definitely a fresh change of pace.

Director of "Desperado" and "From Dusk Till Dawn," Rodriguez has never ventured into parental guidance territory.

Rodriguez scraps the orgy of blood in favor of nifty spy gadgets and trips into a strange and colorful fantasy world.

Antonio Banderas and Carla Gugina star as super-spy parents, supported by Daryl Sabana and Alexa Vega as the crime-fighting pre-teen brother and sister duo.

The children end up battling with a twisted, Willy Wonka-esque villain who has evil aspirations to take over the world with an army of superhuman spy kid robots.

"Spy Kids" hinges on the story of two spies who were enemies but ended up falling in love.

Now parents, they are recruited for a new humanity-saving mission after a nine-year hiatus which invariably gets the whole family involved, whether the parents like it or not.

Things do not go as planned and it becomes the kids' job to save everyone.

It does not all play out as hokey and contrived as it may sound. All the elements of any spy/action movie are there.

There are futuristic vehicles, characters with useful inventions and an array of multipurpose costumes.

However, for every aspect that is borrowed from James Bond flicks, it is done in an imaginative way.

For anyone who is familiar with Rodriguez' work with directing children in "Four Rooms" or his award-winning short film "Bedhead," it should come as no surprise that these kids are not Macaulay Culkin sweet.

Instead, the children are sophisti-

cated, smart-mouthed and savvy. Unfortunately, "Spy Kids," for all of its high speed and free spirited action, at times, tries too hard.

There are some parts of the film that kids will find irresistibly funny when adults will not, and vice-versa.

While the outright spy-movie sequences are undeniably fun and creative, like the villain, Floop and his mutated sidekicks, they sometimes border on nightmarish.

To get a picture of the sidekicks, imagine the vampires in "From Dusk Till Dawn," only with no fangs and splashed in eye-assaulting neon paint and dressed like twisted circus clowns.

Not much can be said about plot or character development, but "Spy Kids" still has a little better than the average MTV-style action movie or sugar-sweet Disney love story.

There is certainly a family-friendly slant to the film.

It lacks guns and blood but, the overall feel is still one of a well-wrought spy movie that happens to star children as its heroes.



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"Spy Kids" stars Antonio Banderas, Carla Gugina, Daryl Sabana and Alexa Vega as a spy family. The movie is director Robert Rodriguez' first film of the "kiddie flick" genre. Do not expect the normal Rodriguez gore and violence. This is a parental guidance rated film