

arts

'Camelot' is successful with good casting choices

By Laurie Dowling

It's not easy to bring *Camelot*, the story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, to the stage. Nearly everyone has been exposed to the tale, be it through storybooks, through the movie *Camelot* or Walt Disney's *The Sword and the Stone*.

But the Village Dinner Theater not only attempts Lerner and Loewe's adaptation of T.H. White's book, *The Once and Future King*, they attempt it in the limited space of their theater-in-the-round. And with a delightful cast they are well-rewarded for their pains.

theater

Camelot is not only about the pomp and glory of the golden age of chivalry, it's also the age-old story of a love triangle. Queen Guenevere, very beautifully portrayed by Elizabeth King, is in love only with King Arthur (Ian Stuart), until the bold knight, Lancelot, enters the scene. Lancelot, played by handsome Sean Hopkins, would turn any woman's head. The three continue along until Mordred, Arthur's illegitimate son, appears and causes a great deal of trouble.

The success or failure of *Camelot* depends upon strong portrayals by the members of the love triangle. Elizabeth King's lovely operatic soprano brings much to the role of Guenevere. King especially shines when the jealous Guenevere is urging the other knights against Lancelot.

Sean Hopkins works very nicely as the eagerly self-righteous Lancelot du Lac. Hopkins is no Robert Goulet, still his rendition of "If Ever I Would Leave You" has the tendency to leave chills.

Ian Stuart takes a little time to warm up as Arthur, the man who became king by pulling a sword from what he thought was a war memorial. In his opening scene with Merlin, Stuart does little to convey the youthful king who struggles to be a leader. But by the second act, Stuart, who looks a bit too much like Richard Harris, is sufficiently in character for the audience to understand the struggle between the duties of a king and the emotions of a man.

The other outstanding cast member is Jerry Rodgers, who portrays both the forgetful Merlin living life backwards, and the wonderfully bumbling King Pellinore. Rodger's Pellinore, typically English even to a monocle, is a joy to behold. The plum role of Mordred, who "must marry well, he's so far below everyone else," is given too much of a villainous leer by Dale Kaufman. It's difficult to understand his sway over the others when his villainy is so evident.

Technical director Kevin Garbelman deals with the problem of multiple staging (from forest to castle and back again) through use of a simplistic set made of marbled geometric shapes which are at one moment a tree, and at another moment a part of the castle. The set's only distraction is the use of canvas covered rocks which don't fit in with this simplistic idea.

Even though it contains flaws, the Village Dinner Theatre's version of *Camelot* is a rather successful portrayal of the flowering of knighthood. The credit should go to director Robert Barton for his choice casting and, of course, to Lerner and Loewe's delightful music.

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