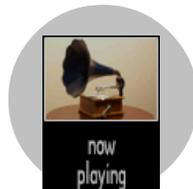


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March 20, 2015:

Henry IV Part One reviewed by Rob Stevens

William Shakespeare's history plays are rarely produced because of the size of the cast needed to portray all the historical figures and necessary for the large battle scenes in some of the works. The Antaeus Theatre Company is currently presenting a scaled down version of *Henry IV Part One* with a cast of 12 (many playing multiple roles) and, in their usual manner, the roles are all partnered—meaning two actors cover each role. The ones mentioned in this review are members of the Knaves cast which were featured at the performance I witnessed.



Michael Kirby, Joel Swetow, Mark Bramhall
Photo by Geoffrey Wade Photography

Uneasy lies the crown on the head of England's King Henry IV (Joel Swetow). With the help of other nobles, he usurped the throne from Richard II and denied it to the rightfully anointed Edmund Mortimer. There are rebels to be subdued in both Wales and Scotland. Even some of his "loyal" subjects seem to be turning against him. The war hero Henry Percy, AKA Hotspur (Joe Holt), has decided to keep his Scottish prisoners as his own slaves rather than give them over to the King as tradition demands. The King has some loyal advisers like Westmoreland (Mark Bramhall) to aid in his decisions. But he receives little input from his son and heir Prince Henry, better known as the rascal Hal (Michael Kirby). Hal prefers to spend his time with near vagrants, thieves and drunkards, most especially the jolly fat Sir John Falstaff (Stephen Caffrey). But when the rebels unite and threaten his father's throne, Hal, along with a reluctant Falstaff, join in the war.



Sally Hughes and Joe Holt
Photo by Geoffrey Wade Photography

The play is a mix of ribald comedy, most at the expense of the cowardly braggart Falstaff and the serious drama of the royal maneuvering. Director Michael Murray and his cast make the best of it but the comedy comes out on top here. The plotting by the King and his advisers as well as by the rebel leaders comes across more as declaiming rather than naturalistic dialogue. However the comedy moments, especially the give and take between Hal and Falstaff has an easy, natural feel to it. Caffrey and Kirby make a dynamic comic twosome.



Stephen Caffrey and Michael Kirby
Photo by Geoffrey Wade Photography

Michael Gend's lighting and Peter Bayne's sound design are well executed. Terri A. Lewis has given a modern dress feel to the costumes, featuring men in suits and combat attire. Instead of large armies of extras crossing the stage carrying opposing standards, the battles are depicted as one-on-one broadsword encounters. These are thrillingly staged by fight choreographer Ken Merckx and are a real highlight of the production.



Antaeus Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd. in North Hollywood. Ends May 3.
818-506-1983 or www.antaeus.org.

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