

You'll Leave 'The Malcontent' Very Content

The wonderful Antaeus Company comes up with another winner in the classical comedy vein — a rip-roaring production of "The Malcontent" (1604).

The poetic revenge play from the Jacobean period offers a terrific mix of courtly intrigue, lust and betrayal, written for boy actors by John Marston (1576-1634), replete with lashings of horror, farce, sex, politics and, and course, betrayal, with a rip-roaring happy ending. What a delight!

This is Shakespeare-plus — a whole lot of fun for the actors and audience alike. All the usual suspects are given full play — the lovers, the enemies, the comics, the sane and sober good guys, beleaguered by the foolish, the losers and the insanely funny that one would expect in a courtly farce/comedy. It has lashings of courtly corruption, bare-faced satire, towering ambition, malice, mischief, and more than a hint of romance and sexual adventuring, pure and not so pure, and often downright raucous — all the things that make late-Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre so eternally intriguing and just a tad shocking to a contemporary audience. A bit of a warning here: the first act language takes a bit of getting used to. While it's not quite Shakespeare, to which theatregoers have become fairly adjusted, especially in modern transliterations, it's not quite contemporary either. The flavor of the language is a tad

tougher than updated versions of old Will S's, and takes a few stanzas to accustom the modern ear to its rhythm. Extremely colorful, in the racy sense, as well as being baldly descriptive and uncompromisingly sexy, the Antaeus Company dives into the text with their accustomed uncompromising spirit, giving it their all which, as anyone who has been around these players for any length of time knows is much more than a lot. Fortunately, for those who get lost in the language, there's a glossary of Malcontent Terms in the "programme" (which is how Shakespeare or Marston would have spelled it). The glossary includes words like Bawd, Drabs, Polecats, and Possets, which might, or might not give you a fair idea of the tenor of the period piece. The two teams dividing acting honors are named Wittols and Cuckolds. That latter is self-explanatory; Wittols, according to the glossary, are compliant cuckolds.

Acting honors go to every one of these eloquent teams who have been doused in the language, as you will have been by the end of the play. Not to worry, however, you don't need to know the language, you'll get the spirit of the play directly from the players.

Leading the honors call is the fabulous J.D. Cullum, who plays Altofront, the usurped Duke of Genoa, who appears, for most of the play in disguise as Malevole the Malcontent, in order to get a jump

Mad About Theatre



by Madeleine Shaner

on his tormentors at court who would have him gone from power. J.D. is a uniquely eloquent actor who "gets it" and "gets it good", whatever the subject role he's playing. Don't worry about not getting to the heart of the complications tangled around the story. The joie de vivre of the rollicking farce will carry you along on its coattails, all the way through the raucous complications of the heroes and villains of the silly/funny, rather naughty, but never offensive comedy. And you don't need to know the language. In fact, it's probably better that you don't. And it is hilarious, giddy, and every fun adjective you can think of, with non-stop servings of that aforementioned joie and vivre. Adrian LaTourelle as Mendoza, the Machiavelian monster, is lots of fun, as are the "girls" of Maquerelle, played by Sandra McClain here, formerly a courtesan, now a pandress (Madam to you).

Of course, everything turns out in the end, as you knew it would, and the beauty part is you don't need to know the language, it's universal. Mark Doerr, as Pietro, the wannabe Duke, is nasty fun as the corrupt pretender. Jason Thomas, Jim Kane, Buck Zachary, all enemies of the usurped Duke, are as corrupt, and as funny, as any politicians one



photo courtesy of Geoffrey Wade

Mark Doerr and Adrian LaTourelle also give strong performances in "The Malcontent".

can name today. Devon Sorvari is charmant as Altofront's imprisoned Duchess. All the members of the Court, the corrupt and the upright, are as funny, and as dubious, as any politicians in any era, in any court, in any land

Elizabeth Swain, the accomplished director of the play, first saw it when she was in grad school and knew it was a play she would one day have to direct. (Its original production was over 400 years ago when it was performed by Children of the Chapel, a boy actors' troupe at London's Blackfriars Theatre in 1603 (the theatre that eventually became the indoor home of Shakespeare's company, The King's Men).

First an actress, then a director, teaching and directing at NYU, Hunter, CCNY, Barnard and Marymount College, Swain moved to Los Angeles in 2008, and is now

a freelance director and teacher, teaching classical theatre in Antaeus classes.

Anyone coming across "The Malcontent" by accident thinks of it as a farce, but its very dark undertones soon creep in. Nothing tragic happens, but a lot almost does. It's a roller coaster ride, savage...and wonderful, with tragedy one minute and comedy the next. Go see it and take your choice. You'll be glad you did.

The Malcontent, presented by Antaeus Company at DeafWest Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m., through June 19. Free parking available in uncovered Citibank parking lot on the west side of Lankershim Boulevard, south of Otsego Street. For information, call (818)506-1983, or visit www.Antaeus.org.



photo courtesy of Geoffrey Wade

J.D. Cullum and Paul Wilson star in "The Malcontent", staged by the Antaeus Company.

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