

Theater Review: "The Malcontent" At Antaeus

Staff Reporter, Katie Buenneke

"'Tis good to trust few, but 'tis best to trust none," Mendoza tells the audience in a moment of confession. This sentiment effectively sums up John Marston's "The Malcontent," now playing at the Antaeus Theatre Company in North Hollywood. The play is entirely double-cast, with the Cuckolds (men whose wives are cheating on them) appearing some nights, the Wittols (cuckolds who don't mind) other nights, and then mixed groups of Cuckolds and Wittols called Beccos (another word for Cuckolds) appearing yet other nights.

"The Malcontent" is a very twisted and convoluted Jacobean play about a deposed duke, Altofront, who wants to regain the dukedom of Genoa. To do this, he disguises himself as the Malcontent, Malevole, and inserts himself in the court of the new duke, Pietro. At the same time, Mendoza is scheming with Pietro's wife, Aurelia, to become duke himself.

Alliances are almost constantly changing, making the play even more difficult to follow. The 17th-century language does not make it any easier for the audience either, though the play makes considerably more sense on a second viewing.

The actors do their best to work with the unfriendly words, which seem even more menacing than Shakespeare, to varying degrees of success. Ramon deOcampo and Adrian LaTourelle in particular do a good job in communicating main villain Mendoza's intentions.

The play itself is definitely not without weaknesses — the second act, for instance, has a few dull moments where the language just becomes overwhelming. The fact that this occurred with both the Cuckolds and Wittols suggests that the fault is in the script, not the acting. Also, both times, the cast was laughing more at the first scene than the audience, making the audience feel awkward and left out of the joke.

Having a double-cast show serves as a double-edged sword to the audience. The play makes infinitely more sense upon a second viewing, but it is almost impossible not to compare the actors to each other. For example, LaTourelle's Mendoza is considerably more comical than deOcampo's, who is much more menacing.

These subtle differences between performances contribute to a different experience every show. The cast does a credible job working with the material. Particular standouts include Lynn Milgram and Saundra McClain as Maquerelle, a conniving woman of the court who will feed any information to anyone for a price, and Jules Willcox as Aurelia, the amorous wife of the new duke. Additionally, Adam Meyer and Alex Knox are enjoyable as Ferneze, a young man who enlists Maquerelle to court Aurelia, only to get caught in the intricate web of plotting in the process.

Lots of credit must also go to Bo Foxworth and JD Cullum in the title role. They have a lot of language and plot to deal with, and do so effectively.

The production itself is not trying to anything radical, but that's fine — if it were, it would most likely be lost in the insurmountability of the play. The costumes are sumptuous and the set is simple but effective. The cast enjoys interacting with the audience, and this works well and provides further amusement to the audience.

The Malcontent is a very difficult play, but Antaeus puts forth a valiant effort in staging it. It may require multiple viewings to fully understand and appreciate, but the show is very entertaining and compelling once you get past the language barrier.