

BACK STAGE



King Lear

Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theatre

Reviewed by Dany Margolies ~ July 01, 2010



PHOTO CREDIT
Ed Krieger

Those who love theater look forward to seeing the great actors perform Lear at that ripe point in their careers. To have two such men in the Los Angeles theater scene at the same time, sharing the role in a double-cast production, is astonishing. Indeed, to see this production's cast filled with L.A.'s finest is a gift not to be missed.

Dakin Matthews and Harry Groener lead the alternate casts as Lear, in a fascinating lesson on actors' choices. Matthews' Lear was born wise; Groener's has wisdom thrust upon him. Matthews' Lear seems to be parsing and intellectually processing his words—an orator. Groener begins

as a simpler man—one who might like Texas barbecue—who crumbles more emotionally, less intellectually, under his eventual realizations. At times Matthews' delivery is so fresh it seems improvised; Groener's performance is a lesson in physically revealing a character.

The two actors playing Kent—Morlan Higgins and Gregory Itzin—stretch toward opposite poles of being an "honorable friend." Both evidence great devotion to Lear. But Higgins' earl is pure, gentle goodness, a willing beta male, while Itzin's Kent frustratedly wishes he could do more, seething over his observant reactions to Lear's great mistakes.

Of the two superb Fools, Stephen Caffrey's is heartbreaking as a too-wise-for-his-good intellectual, while JD Cullum lets loose with gentle classical clowning. Both Fools are objective about their fates, but Caffrey's isn't surprised while Cullum's seems stunned.

So many cast members take so many interesting tacks. Allegra Fulton's Goneril, when asked by Lear to state her love, resembles any nonactor suddenly asked to improvise a speech before an audience. Rebecca Mozo, stepping in to both casts as Cordelia, clearly shows the moment she goes from pretty baby sister to sole clear-eyed sibling. Seamus Dever's Edmund naughtily mocks astrology. As Edgar, John Sloan uses clever bits of business to show us there's no cliff's edge.

Bart DeLorenzo directs with an eye on the timelessness of the play. Each actor speaks without declamation—in a modern, immediate delivery. Tom Buderwitz's set resembles gray granite slabs, which DeLorenzo shifts and slides to create the play's manifold locales; like sick family dynamics, the granite will outlast the generations. A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's costumes evolve from Edwardian through millennial as the play progresses. John Zalewski's sound design figuratively and literally rattles us. The set's bright-red wiring and swinging bulbs take center stage during the electrical storm on the heath, an apt reminder of the power of nature and of theatermaking.