

LAWEEKLY

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KING LEAR – MADMEN CAST



Photo by Ed Krieger

The old loon hasn't looked so good in some time. Bart DeLorenzo's staging for Antaeus Company's Classicsfest 2010 comes with two casts -- "The Fools" and "The Madmen." I saw the "The Madmen" and must reserve comment on the uberconcept until checking out "The Fools" this coming week. No need to reserve any enthusiasm for Harry Groener's Lear. Though his silver beard still doesn't help Groener look a stitch older than 60 (Lear is supposed to be 80-plus), his gives a magnetic interpretation filled with surprises. But first, he renders the words sparkingly, with clarity and sensitivity. When his Fool (JD Cullum, also great -- nimble and smart without being a smart-ass) grills Lear with riddles, Groener's Lear listens and responds with a childlike innocence that is a cloak for growing despondency. And it's that

sojourn toward spiritual oblivion that Groener carves with such intrigue, step by step, with alternate bursts of rage and defeat. He's magnificent and ably matched by Allegra Fulton's richly textured Goneril, who conjures memories of Estelle Parsons, mingled with the late, local actress Pamela Gordon. Gregory Itzin's Kent is grand, as is Nick Cagle's Oswald. Less so some of the supporting players, who render comparatively callow and shallow renditions compared to the masters at the helm. DeLorenzo stages a modernist interpretation that starts with Napoleonic military chic (costumes by A. Jeffrey Schoenberg) -- all those boots stretching up to the thigh -- and evolves to contemporary desert warfare attire. No, this is not an imposition or a gimmick. It fits snugly into the play's expedition into the surreal, in a work about aging and senility, the blessings and curses of time. DeLorenzo's staging suggests that what is unfolding is the history of our times, through ellipses of power and its abuses. He's on firm terra ether.

- Steven Leigh Morris