

The Almanac

Select FILE --> PRINT to print this story.

Arts & Entertainment - Wednesday, June 13, 2007

Review: Fine acting lends depth to MP festival's 'Julius Caesar'

by Karen MacLaughlin

In his director's notes to the playbill, Bruce W. De Les Dernier presumes upon a very old friendship with "Will" for leave to combine characters and alter lines in order to accommodate the number and gender of his cast in the Mid-Peninsula Shakespeare Festival's "The Tragedy of Julius Caesar."

He does so seamlessly.

In this thorough, yet economical, production, the principals all perform wholeheartedly and well, but it is the supporting roles that lend the performance its depth.

Leslie Newport, as Caesar's canny wife, Calphurnia, exudes a nobility and grace that rivals the late Agnes Moorehead. Eric Lyness, as Lucius, is thoroughly moving in his devotion to his mistress, and Josh Parees, as Senator Decius Brutus, grimaces and gestures his disappointment with terrific comic effect. I almost spilled my free cocoa.

Martin A. David raises goosebumps as the accurate Soothsayer ("Beware the Ides!") and D. Michael Kane draws us the perfect gangster in Senator Cinna. His death scene is a classic.

Sara Trupski and Katie Chaidez flirt and flatter their ways convincingly through Trebonius' and Metellus Cimber's lines.

Casca, played a little too self-consciously in the first act by Rachel Bakker, gains more of our trust by the end and Alison Plott plays Portia with an exquisitely tender savagery.

At all times, Mark D. Pickens keeps the plot moving as the ambitious Cassius. His role carries the greatest burden of interpreting antique language for a modern audience, which included children stretched out in sleeping bags on the lawn.

Director De Les Dernier is unwavering as the turncoat Brutus. Todd Wright is largely likeable as Mark Antony, but is not as clear in his motivation, especially during the bloodied-hand reconciliation with Caesar's assassins, and James Mantell struts his way across the stage in the title role.

Presented in modern dress, with a draper's nod to ancient Rome, this very professional production keeps us on the edge of our seats, wrapped in the blankets the staff has provided to keep out the cool, night air. The whole atmosphere is very quietly professional.

All the festival plays are presented free of charge and the actors pass a basket after the show. They deserve a generous financial hand.

INFORMATION

Friday, June 22, is the last opportunity to see "Caesar." The festival continues until June 24, with Shakespeare's "Pericles, Prince of Tyre" staged June 15, 16 and 24; and Moliere's "Tartuffe" staged June 17 and 23. Mid-Peninsula High School is at 1340 Willow Road in Menlo Park. For more information, go to menloplayersguild.org or call 322-3261.

Find this article at:

http://www.AlmanacNews.com/story.php?story_id=4314