

Creative 'Tempest' has music video feel

By Debra Neff Nathans

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The University Theatre's production of Shakespeare's "The Tempest" leads me to wonder: If Shakespeare were writing today, would he write music videos?

The evening emulates music videos in the best way: It is expressive, creative and surreal. "It's got a beat, you can dance to it, I give it a 10, Dick!"

For this production, what may be Shakespeare's last play is set on a gorgeous, ethereal set that is vaguely reminiscent of the stump of a giant tree. Joseph Gratz's sound design dominates, with most of the play set to the beat of bongo drums. There is Renaissance music and music by Nine Inch Nails. There is dance and stylized movement. Giant puppets and shadow puppets play a part. Actors wear modern costumes, including jeans, cutoffs, and Armani suits.

"The Tempest" is a story of a usurped duke, Prospero (Barbara Clayton), trapped on an island with his young daughter, Miranda (Rachel Lewis), a sprite named Ariel (Sommer Austin), and a monster named Calaban (Adam McNulty).

Courtesy of an Ariel-induced storm, Prospero brings his brother and a crew of other nobles onto the island. The nobles include his enemy's son, Ferdinand (Miles W. Hartley), and Prospero initially wants revenge, but gives up on the idea when Ferdinand falls in love with Miranda.

The program notes draw a parallel between the events of Sept. 11 and the themes of revenge in "The Tempest." I think we can find a link to Sept. 11 just about anywhere at this point, and I'm getting a little sick of it.

My favorite interpretation of "The Tempest" views Prospero as the playwright, creating the world he wants to see: vengeance for his usurped throne,

"The Tempest"

By William Shakespeare
University Theatre
Mitchell Theatre
Last show Nov. 3
Tickets \$14,
\$10 UW students
Call 262-1500

everyone getting off the island, and a good marriage for his daughter. He is a character who makes the play happen, rather than taking part in the drama happening to him.

Clayton, with her head shaved, is an interesting non-traditional casting choice for Prospero. She projects an energetic dignity, and is a pleasant ringleader in the circus of dance and sound.

I liked Austin, who played Ariel, less. Austin was more perky than magical. Lewis approaches Miranda with appealing innocence and enthusiasm, and Hartley is equally likable as her love interest.

McNulty is an energetic and funny Calaban, and he played him with a sense of justice. His Calaban doesn't want to be a bit player in his own exploitation, but he doesn't know anything else.

John Michael Graham and Mitchell Mullen were funny as the two clowns, and a silly scene where they introduce Calaban to the joys of booze is particularly memorable.

There were moments when the play seemed so caught up in its concept that it lost sight of other less sexy, but important moments. For example, Prospero abruptly stops Miranda and Ferdinand's nuptial celebration, because he is worried about a plot between Calaban and the two clowns to kill him. This plays as a dark moment, but the audience knows that the clowns are no threat to Prospero, and he dispatches with them so easily that he must have known it too. The moment doesn't make a lot of sense.