

WANNA SEE "THE TEMPEST?"

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ARTS

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'Tempest' an untraditional treat

By Nick Kaplan

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As I sat and watched the University Theatre's adaptation of "The Tempest," I wondered what William Shakespeare would have thought. With costumes ranging from Armani suits to ripped-up daisy dukes, techno music-dancing spirits and a woman playing the lead role of Prospero, this was not exactly a traditional portrayal of Shakespeare's tale of betrayal, magic and forgiveness. Yet all these eccentricities seemed not only to make the Shakespearean language and themes more accessible to this largely college-age audience, but also accentuated and magnified the level of dark surrealism and creepiness that can be read into this play.

Barbara Clayton, a professor at UW-Madison and seasoned director in the Madison Rep, plays the role of Prospero with a unique quirkiness. The choice to cast Prospero as a woman is particularly interesting as it is a complete role reversal of traditional Elizabethan theater where the men played all the parts, both male and female. However, Clayton holds this play together with magnificent stage presence, partially because of her gleaming bald head and her dark but subtly odd portrayal of the vengeful Prospero. John Graham, Mitchell Mullen and Adam McNulty get plenty of laughs with their hilarious presentation of Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban's drunken antics. Mullen especially shows his comic experience as he brings the house down in several scenes. Other notable performances come from Dominik R. Rebilas' calculating evil representation of Antonio and Sommer Astin's Tinkerbell-like Ariel.

Like many of Shakespeare's works, the plot



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY THEATRE

Ariel (Sommer Austin) lurks in the shadows of the lovers, Ferdinand and Miranda (Miles W. Hartley and Rachel Lewis).

of "The Tempest" is convoluted and full of examination of the human psyche. The play opens with Antonio, Sebastian, Alonso and Gonzolo on a ship struggling through a severe storm. The audience is soon transported to the island that Prospero and his daughter Miranda have been living on. Here, as Prospero and Miranda watch the shipwreck from ashore, the audience and Miranda learn that Prospero has commanded his servant spirit, Ariel, to bring the ship down. He then explains how Antonio, his brother, usurped him as Duke of Milan with the aid of the king of Naples, Alonso. Prospero's old friend Gonzolo was the only one who helped him out of Milan with Miranda and his books of magic, the source of his

power. It seems Prospero has orchestrated this shipwreck to confront his enemies and right the wrongs.

Next we meet Caliban, the slave of Prospero, who detests his master for a variety of reasons, but mostly because he believes Prospero stole the island from his mother, the witch Sycorax. From this point Ferdinand, the son of Alonso, finds his way onto the beach and falls in love with Miranda. Prospero, who is very protective of his daughter's virginity, promises Miranda's hand in marriage, but first demands Ferdinand fetch some firewood. Meanwhile Antonio, Sebastian, Alonso and Gonzolo are stranded on some other part of the island. Ariel then enters the scene and puts everybody to sleep except Antonio and

Sebastian. Antonio then convinces Sebastian, Alonso's brother, that he would be the next heir to the throne of Naples and should take this power while he can. Unfortunately for the two conspirators, they are thwarted by Ariel, who wakes up the sleeping king just as he is about to be stabbed.

On some other part of the island Caliban comes across the ship idiot, Trinculo, and Alonso's butler, Stephano. Trinculo and Stephano, after getting over the fears of the savage, feed him some wine. The three proceed to get drunk and fill the comic void of this play, as Caliban literally kisses the feet of Stephano and promises him that he can make him king of this island. Confronted with the dark magic of Prospero, the love-struck duo of Miranda and Ferdinand and the comic idiocy of Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban, the remainder of this play leads us to a final confrontation between Prospero and his wrongdoers. The question is: Will he forgive his enemies or continue his reign of magic and vengeance?

This adaptation of "The Tempest" challenges the traditional idea of Shakespeare. It is both figuratively and literally engaging. While in one scene Prospero calls forth some spirits to perform a dance for Ferdinand and Miranda, actually pulling audience members on stage to dance to the bizarre but fitting techno music. The modern costumes, dark electronic music, simple but very effective staging and spectacular lighting make this play stand out. Insightfully directed by Carolyn Haycraft, this adaptation of "The Tempest" experiments with the norm and is worth the time of someone looking for something old, but at the same time very fresh.