

# Sound and fury

*But does the UW's lavish Tempest signify anything?*

By Jeremy Harrell

**T**his ain't no party, this ain't no disco, but there is some fooling around in the University Theatre's production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (now on at Mitchell Theatre). With the aid of some high-octane recorded music, live drumming and funky lighting, director Carolyn Haycraft has recast the Bard's tale of sea-changed souls into a feast of sound and light that left me more tired than satisfied.

For the sake of simplicity, let's divide Shakespeare's modern interpreters into two camps. There are those who think constant recontextualizations of the 16th- and 17th-century plays ring truest in the contemporary ear. Baz Luhrmann's slice-and-dice 1996 movie *Romeo + Juliet* and last year's film version of *Hamlet* by Michael Almereyda fall into that camp, as do stage productions that set the plays in the Orient or Nazi Germany.

Another camp prefers stripped-down, context-less interpretations that don't pile on associations the playwright never intended. I rest more comfortably in the second camp, but I'm willing spend a night in the first if the campers promise to show me a good time.

Despite the production's relatively lavish trappings, Haycraft and company give *The Tempest* room to breathe, which is a good sign. The only problem is that the actors seem more at ease carrying out Haycraft's stylized vision of the play than in delivering their lines in a way the audience can understand. Barbara Clayton, a theater professor at the UW, plays Prospero, the deposed duke who's created an island of magic and wonder but longs to return to Milan and exact revenge on the brother who cast him out. Clayton's performance lacks spirit, as if Prospero had cast a spell over the whole island and turned the actors into wooden figures that on occasion come to life.

Haycraft's production is full of fun details and is quite exciting at times, but it serves as a cover for the lackluster ensemble acting. Welcome exceptions were John Graham and Mitchell Mullen, who play Trinculo and Stephano, two shipwrecked fools who make a slave of the aborigine Caliban (Adam McNulty) while falling prey to the spell of Prospero's sprites. Graham, Mullen and McNulty establish the only actorly relationship in the production and find plenty of humor for the audience to enjoy.

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