

# Mid-Atlantic Traveler

Mid-Atlantic Traveler reviews the people, places, events, and foodways of the Roanoke, Shenandoah, Cumberland, and Susquehanna Valleys, with a particular emphasis on shows at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA.

Monday, October 25, 2010

## The American Shakespeare Center on Tour and ASC Rocks at Mockingbird

I have recently relocated to Virginia, though not close enough to Staunton where I could spend all of my free time. Alas, maybe one day. Anyway, we are close enough to visit any of the American Shakespeare Center on Tour's "Restless Ecstasy Tour" stops in the Shenandoah and Roanoke Valleys. My wife recently attended the performance of "As You Like It" at Hollins University as I was still home in North Carolina wrapping up things and we both attended "Measure for Measure" and "Macbeth" at VMI in the new Leslie Gillis, Jr. Memorial Theater.

Here is a guest post from my wife, reviewing "As You Like It" at Hollins University:



Rick Blunt in *As You Like It*. Photo by Michael Bailey.

I had the immense pleasure of seeing AYLI performed at Hollins University. This performance was a once in a lifetime experience for one reason alone: the audience. I have attended many ASC performances over the past two years, but this was the best crowd I have ever experienced. The atmosphere in the Hollins Theatre was electric, from the second that Rick Blunt came out on stage to welcome us to the four times the cast was called back out by our thunderous standing ovation. During the intermission, Jake Mahler gave a performance of John Denver's "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" that nearly brought the house down. (His turn as Adam in the play is also not to be missed.) Audience members were square dancing in the aisles.

Other stand out performances included Denice Burbach as Rosalind, Brandi Rhome as Celia, Blunt as Touchstone, and Chad Bradford as Orlando. My favorite scene of the night was the wrestling scene. In this scene Chad Bradford's character Orlando faces off with Jonathan Holtzman's Charles the wrestler. Both actors really got into the scene and even illicit a Ric Flair "WOOOOOOOO" from Rick Blunt's Touchstone after a knife edge chop.

This was the best performance I've ever seen by the touring troupe, thanks in large part to the amazingly strong performances of all the actors and the enthusiasm and vigor of the Hollins Theatre crowd.

So, as you can see, this touring troupe set expectations high for me.

I had never read or seen a production (video or stage) of "Measure for Measure" so I was going in kind of blind. I knew the basic plot and story, but that was it. I

### About Me



Adrian

Mid-Atlantic Traveler reviews the people, places, events, and foodways of the Shenandoah, Cumberland, and Susquehanna Valleys.

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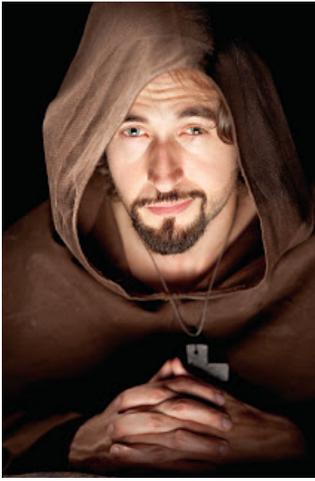
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Chad Bradford in *Measure for Measure*. Photo by Michael Bailey.

found the play to be quite entertaining and darkly funny. ASC veteran favorites Rick Blunt as Lucio and Dennis Henry as Pompey provided most of the comic relief. Henry affects a New Jersey accent and his costume is ridiculous right down to the sunglasses. This production definitely plays up the humor in the story. Jake Mahler plays Angelo and does a tremendous job as the hypocritical, power wielding substitute for the Duke, played exceptionally by Chad Bradford. Brandi Rhome turns in one of her typically outstanding damsel in distress performances as the

dilemma riddled Isabella. Kelley McKinnon is wonderful as Mistress Overdone and Jonathan Holtzman turns in a great performance as both Escalus and Barnardine. I was also very impressed with Daniel Jimenez as the Provost and Aidan O'Reilly as Claudio and the ostensibly lobotomized Froth. I really enjoyed the performance and I was pulled into the action quite a bit as we sat on stage. The pre-show music was also wonderful with outstanding vocal performances by O'Reilly and Holtzman in particular. After the show there was a "Talk Back" with Mahler, Rhome, Bradford, and McKinnon. This is the first one of these question and answer sessions we had been to and it was interesting to hear the actors' takes on the play and to learn about life on the road and their educational backgrounds. I definitely will read the play now that I have seen it.



Jonathan Holtzman in *Macbeth*. Photo by Michael Bailey.

The next night we saw *Macbeth*. The theater was about 90% full and we again sat on stage. The pre-show music was great again, with one highlight being Denice Burbach and Blunt doing the song "Just Can't Wait to be King," from "The Lion King." I've heard that *Macbeth* is not a play that some performers look forward to. So many people have seen so many versions both stage and film and have preconceived notions about how it should be presented. Personally, my favorite version is Roman Polanski's 1971 horror film. I also like Orson Welles' weirdo version from 1948. Anyway, this was a good, solid performance. Jonathan Holtzman plays *Macbeth* and certainly looks the part, at least in my preconceived notion of what

*Macbeth* would look like. The comic master Blunt does a great job in the serious role of Banquo. Denice Burbach steals the show as Lady *Macbeth*, as is often the case in performances of the Scottish Play. Daniel Jimenez, Natasha Solomon, Brandi Rhome, and Kelley McKinnon are terrific as Hecate and the Weird Sisters. Dennis Henry is always convincing as a King and he does a great job as Malcolm and as the Porter.

On Sunday, October 24 we attended "The Taming of the Shrew" at the Blackfriars and our second ASC concert of the year: ASC Rocks at Mockingbird. This concert, held in the Roots Music Hall at Mockingbird was a combined resident and touring troupe effort and it was wonderful. The acoustics at the Music Hall are wonderful and the sound was spectacular. The energy level among the crowd was less than the March 28 show at the Blackfriars, mostly because we couldn't really get up and move and the crowd was small (tiny music hall compared to the large Blackfriars). Unfortunately, I didn't compile a set-list, but the songs are from the "Restless Ecstasy Tour" and the summer/fall Blackfriars seasons, so go see all of them if you want to hear the songs. All of these performers are amazingly talented musicians. Chris Johnston, Ben Curns, Jeremiah Davis, Daniel

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Kennedy, Jake Mahler, and Aidan O'Reilly were particularly impressive on this night. The touring troupe will be holding a New Year's Eve concert following Rick Blunt's performance in The Santaland Diaries and I'll be sure to be there!

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at 3:21 PM

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