



[The Knight of the Burning Pestle](#)

A Play within a Play within a Play

By Francis Beaumont

[American Shakespeare Center](#), Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, Va.

Saturday, April 24, 2010, C-10&11 (center stalls)

Directed by Jim Warren



Rick Blunt as Rafe playing the titular *Knight of the Burning Pestle* at the Blackfriars Playhouse. Photo by Tommy Thompson, American Shakespeare Center.

Pestle, nor even the grocer's interpositions, for that matter—are especially well-written, and the conflation is clumsy. ASC's production further hindered the melding by having the original acting troupe perform in circus-like makeup and costume and play in over-the-top stylized form. It's like they were attempting to create a fourth wall that they could then break through (by comparison, ASC's own *The Rehearsal* achieved a similar guests-as-cast-commentary device much more seamlessly).

The upside is that in the hands of ASC's Rough, Rude, & Boisterous Tour troupe, the production was still highly entertaining and full of clever laughs. Rick Blunt as the apprentice Rafe playing the titular knight was a sweet combination of innocent boy and Quixotian hero, who so effectively crashed through the fourth wall that he made two audience members integral to the action. Ginna Hoben played the grocer's wife, Nell, as a dressed-up, sexed-up trailer-park honey, requiring two sittings to truly appreciate the play: once to watch the main action, and once to watch only her watching the main action.

Aidan O'Reilly did disparate double duty as Indigo Toad playing the always-singing Mr. Merrythought in *Merchant* and George the dwarf in *Knight*. James Patrick Nelson, meanwhile, did not do disparate duty as Kenneth T. Umbrage, giving an over-the-top performance of the *Merchant* lead Venturewell while taking serious umbrage at having to play Tim, the knight's squire, until he finally gets worn down. The two-time scene stealer was David Zimmerman. As Vic Smilei playing Michael in *Merchant*, Zimmerman made Beaumont seem a genius with his description of the Giant Barber (describing in terrified fancy what is merely a haircut); for *Knight*, he donned a skirt and large panties to play the

This was a play that proved to be much better in the telling than in the writing. Interesting concept, especially coming from a Jacobean playwright: As the play *The London Merchant* begins, a grocer in the audience interrupts the production and orders that it be revamped to include his apprentice as the hero, and thus *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* begins even as *The London Merchant* continues and the grocer and his wife conflate the two plays. It's kind of a 17th century *Last Action Hero* or *Purple Rose of Cairo*.

The problem is that in Beaumont's hands, neither of the plays—*The London Merchant* nor *The Knight of the Burning*

WILL POWER ON STAGE

The Knight of the Burning Pestle begins even as *The London Merchant* continues and the grocer and his wife conflate the two plays. It's kind of a 17th century *Last Action Hero* or *Purple Rose of Cairo*.

This touring troupe On Stage:

[All's Well That Ends Well—In Bertram's Bliss. All's Well That Ends Well](#)

[Romeo and Juliet—Great Verse + Teen Passion – Horniness = A Chaste Play](#)

Other plays within plays On Stage:

[Hamlet—The Clown Prince of Denmark](#)

[The Mistical Hyster of Henry \(I\)V—A Shakespeare Stew: Dice Four Plays Add Salt. Mix It All Up. Serve Hot](#)

[The Rehearsal—Special Affects](#)

[Women Beware Women—Acting the Fine Line of Absurdity](#)

Also on Shakespeareances.com:

[The Shakespeareances.com Top 40](#)

[A list of productions seen](#)

[About the editor](#)

[Standards & Etiquette](#)

[Sponsorship and Advertising opportunities](#)

[Sign up for free weekly e-mail updates \(safe, secure, spamless, and unshared\)](#)

[Home](#)

saucy Pompiona, trying to seduce the knight, even prepared to throw down with Rafe's true London love Susan (a woman in the audience Blunt had zoned in on).

That triangular moment featuring Pompiona (Zimmerman), Rafe (Blunt), and Susan (who knows?) was evidence of the magic ASC's companies always manage to achieve, a magic that comes from selfless teamwork, big-hearted courage, and 100 percent effort and awareness.

Eric Minton
April 26, 2010

Comment: e-mail editorial@shakespeareances.com

Start a discussion in the [Bardroom](#)

© 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 Eric Minton

All Rights Reserved

[On Stage](#) [On Screen](#) [On Air](#) [In Print](#) [Commentaries](#) [Dialogues](#) [Shakespeareure](#)

[Bard on the Boards](#) [Theater Links](#) [Web Links](#) [Shakespeare News](#) [Productions Seen](#) [Shakespeareances.com Top 40](#)

[Home](#) [Updates](#) [About](#) [Standards & Etiquette](#) [Sponsorships](#) [Terms & Conditions](#) [Contact](#)



Follow @Shakespeareance