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The American Shakespeare Company
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In sum, the 2007 Renaissance Season shows were visually arresting and frequently surprising. By contrast, certain moments of the ASC Summer/Fall Season felt static in comparison, as if more time to rehearse somehow yielded less urgency, and therefore less theatrical capital (I found the pastoral parts of *The Winter's Tale* interminable, for example). One of the most notable things about this company is its use of popular music in preludes and interludes. The 2007 season was marred by what struck me as an inexplicable staging choice: the decision to confine the majority of these musical interludes to the balcony (for example, *Romeo and Juliet's* opening number "Under Pressure"; "Hazy Shade of Winter" in *The Winter's Tale*). Whether the choice to wedge musicians together above the stage conforms to some newly-discovered principle of OP staging, I'm not sure. I am sure the decision leached energy from the playhouse instead of infusing the room with color and noise.

Director Jaq Bessell's wise choice to buck this decision for the opening sequence of her *Love's Labours Lost* (the summer's standout show) should, I hope, force the ASC to revisit their desire to imprison their music. *Love's Labours* opened in a riotous can-can club, a love-struck Berowne (Jan Knightley) circling around the dancers and zeroing in on the woman who would later appear as his Rosaline (Elisabeth S. Rodgers, here delivering a stunning torch song). Dance choreographer Doreen Bechtol (also appearing as Moth) deserves praise for this scene's composition, as does Kimberly Morris for her vivid costumes. The play's transition in the fifth act from comedy to tragedy (with the news of the death of the French king) was swift and stunning.

Love's Labour's Lost, at least at its conclusion, therefore hit the saddest note of the season while the first few acts of *Romeo and Juliet* hit the funniest. The ball at the Capulets was represented as an exuberant dance to "Twist and Shout," and at this moment one felt far removed from tragedy. A veritable engine of comedy, Mercutio (Curns) nailed every bawdy joke and mounted a compelling crusade against the delusions of romantic love, the play clearly turning dark after his death. Granted, the ASC advertises its ability to "show the world how much comedy Shakespeare wrote into his drama and how much drama he put in his comedies."

ASC artistic director Jim Warren also writes in his notes to *Antony and Cleopatra* that "if you think laughter doesn't belong in Shakespeare's tragedies, I'm glad you are here to join us." Certainly tragedy and comedy are not, and ought not to be, separate phenomena, but I for one would like ASC directors to consider what might get lost in the over-solicitation of laughter or the quest to keep Shakespeare "familiar."

Antony and Cleopatra ended jarringly abruptly, the actors concluding the play posing in the "Egyptian" stance familiar to Bangles fans. Antony (Knightley) in this production was consistently self-mocking, often mugging to the audience and sharply undercutting his own death scene; I'd have liked to have seen in him some element of the Antony for whom Enobarbus (Curns) died of a broken heart—the only character in all of Shakespeare so to die—but I didn't. There was much to admire about this well-paced production (Glenzer as Octavia and Harrell as Caesar, for example) but I don't always want Shakespeare to be "immediate and recognizable" (Warren's notes). The power of *Antony and Cleopatra* lies in its alien or mysterious or infinitely various parts—Cleopatra's tantalizingly oblique "something it is I would—Oh,

my oblivion is a very Antony," our sense of her as a series of performances without center and without end. This Cleopatra (Rodgers) seemed to confirm the narrower Roman view of her, rather than Antony's more expansive vision.

I conclude with an arresting stage picture from *The Winter's Tale* (directed by Kathleen Powers). At the play's end, Paulina (Glenzer) pushed out a statue of Hermione (Rodgers) on a pedestal. We were clearly meant to understand that Hermione was, in fact, stone. The statuesque Rodgers impressively managed her appearance as literal statue—she was unblinking, unbreathing, completely immobile. When she came to life (with a sharp, prolonged intake of breath), the moment was played as miraculous: where she was stone, now she is flesh, and the dead wife is restored to Leontes (although this scene focused more on Hermione's reunion with Perdita, the reunion with the husband acted as bittersweet, to say the least). Textual purists might blink at this—after all, the scene includes several lines teasingly acknowledging that the statue seems to breathe ("Would you not deem it breathed? And that those veins did verily bear blood?"), and earlier it is suggested Paulina has been feeding somebody, somewhere, several times a day. These lines were not cut from the production. Nevertheless, Powers clearly committed to this choice, in part, I think, to preserve the character of Paulina, whose anger would seem disturbingly comprehensive if she were able to conspire to keep Leontes from his living wife for so long (indeed, Hermione, if alive, would also be long to this conspiracy; she tells Perdita that she has "preserved herself" in the hopes of seeing her daughter one day). In other words, if Hermione's reanimation is unambiguously miraculous, then the women of the play are unambiguously good, the reawakening proof of something like divine intervention compensating for the death of Mamillius (Heyward). The moment was visually beautiful, Rodgers' performance of "stone" flawless—but I confess I regretted the absence of a Hermione and Paulina in long league with each other. I prefer my magic to belong to this world: two women keeping their pact to punish Leontes for sixteen years, and yet still able to find forgiveness. What might on the face of it seem to be a risky directorial decision—to have Hermione rise from the dead—ended up ironing out some of the play's important complexities.

The Summer/Fall season left me thinking about theatrical process—and what certain forms of divine directorial intervention (within an OP framework) end up sacrificing. In the pursuit of laughter or accessibility or intimacy, does this theater sometimes overlook wonder?