

BIRMINGHAM NEWS
Birmingham, Alabama
DAILY

APR-17-00

Boys ably handles title role in 'Lear'

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Performing the lead role in *King Lear*, William Shakespeare's regal masterpiece, must feel like running a marathon.

The actor in question must handle several famous, eloquent speeches; slide queasily from arrogance to madness; command respect and empathy; and remain the focal point on stage for three hours.

Luckily, Barry Boys is nearly every inch a king in the Alabama Shakespeare Festival production of *Lear*, which runs through July 23 in Montgomery.

Boys handles lyrical text and thorny emotions equally well, and if his strength seemed to fade a bit near the end during a recent matinee . . . well, that's understandable. Sir John Gielgud has moved with complete assurance through this labyrinth, but we may well forgive others for stumbling.

Shakespeare's meditation on parental love and filial responsibility also operates as the dramatic epitaph of a man facing old age, summing up his life and career as he darkly anticipates death. But *Lear* is far from a nonstop gloomfest; the play has its humorous moments, too — many of which are provided in this production by Philip Pleasants as Fool.

Singing wry ditties, making jokes, cajoling and supporting the declining king when others desert him, Pleasants makes us miss his caustic Fool all the more when he disappears into

★★★
KING LEAR

By William Shakespeare. Directed by Kent Thompson. Presented by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Montgomery. Cast:

- King Lear.....Barry Boys
- Fool.....Philip Pleasants
- Goneril.....Greta Lambert
- Regan.....Monica Bell
- Cordelia.....Jennifer Mudge Tucker
- Earl of Kent.....Rodney Clark
- Earl of Gloucester.....Paul Hebron
- Edmund.....John G. Preston
- Edgar.....Brian Kurlander
- Duke of Cornwall.....Ray Chambers
- Duke of Albany.....Greg Thornton
- Oswald.....Charlton David James

The Octagon.

Performances through July 23.
1-800-841-4273 for tickets.

the mist at intermission.

Still, Boys has plenty of support from a large cast, most of whom inhabit their medieval characters with skill and ease. Jennifer Mudge Tucker sometimes stiffly or aggressively misses the mark as Lear's favorite daughter, Cordelia, but Greta Lambert is all appropriate, steely fire as Goneril.

John G. Preston squeezes laughs from his lines, as well as shudders, as the villainous Edmund; Brian Kurlander catches the eye when he transforms from nobleman to unhinged vagrant as Edgar.

Director Kent Thompson obviously has an intimate understanding of the intricacies of *King Lear*, and he makes sure any wooden recitation is kept to a tolerable minimum.