



Special to the Advertiser

Barry Boys portrays the title role in 'King Lear.'

Ideal cast, direction create 'Lear'

By Allan Swafford
Special to the Advertiser

So complex is "King Lear" that no production approaches definitiveness. Each follows its path to open new vistas for its audiences. In this respect the newly opened mounting at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival is typical. Kent Thompson's intelligent direction reveals much, largely through a high level-cast that is often inspired in its choice of actors and its acting choices.

"Lear" on a major level is an examination of the failure of love — love in a broad sense that includes shades ranging from mere loyalty to the most intimate familial emotions. Two daughters turn on their aged father who himself foolishly rejects a third daughter. A son betrays his father, a brother his brother. Wives cuckold husbands. At the end only three characters, the daughter Cordelia, the son Edgar and the loyal Kent, reveal a redemptive, constant face of love.

Thompson's direction not only opens vistas; it also unobtrusively modulates this massive play so that its audience, rapt in the action, has no sense of unusual length. His decisions — such as making Edmund, a more evil villain than even Iago, an auditor to an early discussion of his illegitimacy, thus strengthening his motivation — contribute to the distinctive clarity of this production.

An ideal cast carries the production. Greg Thornton and Ray Chambers contrast to great effect as the disparate husbands of Lear's daughters Goneril and Regan. Paul Hebron's Gloucester, a foil of Lear, brings a refreshing and telling gentleness to the role. Rodney

'King Lear': ASF's play explosive, breathtaking

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Clark's virile, constant Kent is a dynamic characterization. Philip Pleasants' Fool, an unexpected casting, is an ingenious choice and a breathtaking performance.

The villainous Edmund, in John Preston's inspired hands, is a coolly nuanced and entirely believable creation even in his deathbed repentance, a moment sometimes difficult to accept. The pairing of Greta Lambert and Monica Bell as Goneril and Regan is a stroke of genius as they interact explosively, playing off each other magnificent-

ly. Brian Kurlander's Edgar, a role second only to Lear in importance, is carefully crafted and expertly played.

Barry Boys' Lear is a thoughtful performance, with gripping moments, in which a pervasive gentleness renders his explosions of temper more grating and his passages of pathos more touching.

Allan Swafford has reviewed local theater for more than 15 years. You can contact him by writing Allan Swafford, c/o the Montgomery Advertiser, 200 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104 or by faxing (334) 261-1548.

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WANT TO GO?

- What: "King Lear" by William Shakespeare
- When: Runs through July 23 in repertory
- Where: Alabama Shake-