

Written by Thom White
Monday, 22 March 2010 06:00



If there's anything at which the Prenzie Players excel - and the theatre group excels at quite a few things - it's the ability to convey the meaning of Shakespeare's words to those who may have trouble following the dialogue and, therefore, the plot. (I.e. me.) And that strength is all the more important in the Prenzies' current undertaking, *Troilus & Cressida*. While watching the opening-night performance, I rarely understood what exactly was going on by way of what was said. But thanks to the passion behind

how

it was said, I was neither bored nor disinterested.

Long-considered impossible to stage, *Troilus & Cressida* takes place in the later years of the Trojan War. Achilles (Steve Quartell), the Greeks' hero, has removed himself from battle, preferring to spend his days with his lover, Patroclus (Cole McFarren), and enjoying a love-affair-through-letters with the daughter of Priam (Matt Moody), the king of Troy. Priam and Agamemnon (Pat Flaherty) endeavor to bring Achilles and the Trojans' hero, Hector (David Furness), face-to-face on the battlefield - a plan that, for the Greeks, involves a scheme to first pair Ajax (Matt Mercer) against Hector, enticing Achilles back into action.

While their names make up the title of the play, the story of Troilus (Andy Koski) and Cressida (Jaci Entwisle) makes up but a fraction of its telling. This is unfortunate, however, as their storyline - a romance that ends with the handing over of Cressida to the Greeks - is the clearest of any in Shakespeare's script.



Troilus & Cressida is a theatrically complicated twist of time, a confusing back-and-forth between the Greeks and Trojans, with the audience witness to events that take place in two locations simultaneously. Thankfully, to make the chronology of events clearer, director Maggie Woolley cleverly incorporates a radio announcement with the time of day at the top of the opening act (with the Trojans), and then does so again at the top of the second act, starting the same day over again (with the Greeks).

Helping to visibly distinguish the two warring sides within her peach color palette, Woolley and fellow costume designer Cait Bodenbender dress the characters in distinct patterns and levels of finery. The Trojans wear leather armor, fine suits, and even underwear meant to convey a greater wealth than the Greeks, who are clothed in camouflage pants.

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Woolley has also assembled a cast of committed actors who seem to hold nothing back either physically or emotionally; space limitations prevent me from mentioning each, though every actor deserves accolades. Of particular note: Quartell offers a balance of cockiness and disinterest; Furness presents the heroic Hector as both strong and admirable, and displays a caliber of acting ability that's *equally* admirable; McFarren (who also portrays Paris) is believably enamored with Quartell's Achilles; Entwisle creates a likable Cressida in a script that makes that a tough task; Denise Yoder seems completely comfortable with the language and physical representation of Pandarus; and Moody, as one of the Myrmidons, well-embodies the play's perception of the Greeks as lowbrow. (Moody's ad-libbed lines, however, are all-too-often delivered louder than the script's actual dialogue.)



While each actor seems to know exactly what his or her character is saying, none seem as fluent with the language as J.C. Luxton, who delivers Ulysses' lines as if this were the way Luxton actually spoke in daily life. He's also not tripped up by rhymes, which do affect the naturalistic cadences of some of the other actors.

And I would be remiss not to set Stephanie Burrough apart from the others. Her Helen of Troy is good, but her camp whore, Thersites, is amazing. With loose and brazen physical movements, she brings humor to a character who has led a humorless life. It's fun to watch from the audience, but Thersites' humor is also clearly a coping mechanism for the character, and that Burrough is able to present it as one is a testament to her strength as an actress.

I am somewhat relieved to say, based on my conversations with others, that I was not the only one who struggled to understand the plot of *Troilus & Cressida*. I think that's Shakespeare's fault. It's to the Prenzie Players'

credit

, though, that I was not bored, and actually quite enjoyed watching the show... despite my confusion.

For more information, visit PrenziePlayers.com.

Thom White covers entertainment news for WQAD Quad Cities News 8.

Greek Unorthodox: "Troilus & Cressida," at 1616 Second Avenue in Rock Island through March 28

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