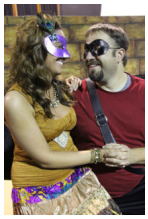
Written by Thom White
Monday, 22 October 2012 06:00



Jeremy Mahr seems to be dancing with his dialogue as Willmore, the titular character in the Prenzie Players' *The Rover*. Author Aphra Behn's words trip the light fantastic off his tongue, with Mahr presenting his rakish playboy so playfully that it's as though he's fluent in the stylized, 17th Century language of the period. And when the meaning of what he's saying is expressed through his entire body – particularly during Willmore's more amorous lines – the obviously fully invested Mahr is incredibly fun to watch.

There's a particular, fully amusing moment here that exemplifies the tone of his characterization, when Mahr, in one fluid move, grabs a beer from under a bench while spinning 360 degrees and descending to a seated, side-saddle position. But this kind of playful suaveness inhabits Mahr's entire performance as a man who, during carnival season in Naples, falls in love with Diane Emmert's Hellena – prior to her brother's imposed imprisonment of her in a convent – and also wins the love of Maggie Woolley's Angelica, a beautiful and well-known courtesan.

There's not much that's subtle about director Stephanie Burrough's telling of this tale, starting with Emmert's exaggerated enunciation – and the matching physical interpretations of her words – in the opening scene. And many of the other actors here match this style of voicing and playing Behn's characters with similar broadness. Yet while their efforts sometimes border on overacting, they land on the comedic side of acceptability, as *The Rover* is, after all, a comedy – and a rather crass one at that.

Woolley, as usual, drips with sexuality, from her sultry alto voice to her sensual demeanor to – why not? – her pole dance, one that elicited applause during Friday's performance. When Woolley and Mahr share the stage, just the two of them, they create that which I most love about theatre: the undeniable invitation to escape into a dream world. There's a magic in their chemistry that adds credibility to their staged infatuation, and I was lost in their moments together just as much as Woolley and Mahr appeared lost in each other's eyes.

PrenzielPlayers.com [redacted]