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Cal Shakes' 'The Tempest' Not to be Missed

By Lou Fancher



Michael Winters, Erika Chong Shuch, James Carpenter, and Catherine Castellanos in *The Tempest*, directed by Jonathan Moscone
Photo Kevin Berne

California Shakespeare Theater (Cal Shakes) sailed into the outdoor theater season and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* June 2 with gusty winds, bone-rattling temperatures, magical moments, and a surprise.

Although nestled snugly in the golden grasses of Orinda's hills, the Bruns Amphitheater offered little protection from Mother Nature, whose fog and freeze added gravitas to the playwright's chilling tale of shipwreck, betrayal, revenge, love and redemption.

Now in their 40th season, Cal Shakes' audiences weather it all and find their reward in the company's brilliant actors, clarion direction, and impressive production values like this production's costumes by Anna Oliver—who deserves and will receive more accolades later in this review—and Lighting Designer Gabe Maxson's ability to capitalize on amber sunsets and floodlit trees.

But it was Artistic Director Jonathan Moscone's instinct—to collaborate with, and ultimately cast as the spirit Ariel, choreographer Erika Chong Shuch—that surprised.

From the first stormy scene, with yellow-slickered boatswains careening madcap across set designer Emily Greene's sharded set, Shuch delivered the production's most brilliant character and enough shine to steal more than a little wind from Shakespeare's (and Moscone's) sails.

A synopsis of *The Tempest* points to Prospero as the lead

character. The formidable sorcerer and former Duke of Milan has been overthrown by his brother, Antonio, and Alonso, the King of Naples. Cast aside on an island, Prospero aims to regain his rightful mantle, if not for himself, for his daughter, Miranda. Aided by the spirit Ariel, Prospero commands the elements—from earth to sea to man to ethereal beast. In the process of retaliation, love blooms between his daughter and his enemy's son, Ferdinand, which bends Prospero's desire for revenge into forgiveness and unification.

The burden then is on actor Michael Winters, who plays a gracious Prospero and doubles as a burly, blustery steward in one of several transform-in-seconds double-casting moves by Moscone.

The good news/bad news is that Shuch, aided by the most impressive Sprites this side of mythology (Melanie Elms, Travis Santell Rowland and Aaron Moreland), is mesmerizing. Her Ariel bewitches in balletic moves and explicitly delivered gestures. The elegance and spontaneity she displays with the text is blessedly unaffected and only when Nicholas Pelczar—a true lark, as Ferdinand—is onstage, is it possible to tear attention away from her energy.

The swirl of two-for-one casting is astonishing. Catherine Castellanos puts forth a shotgun Caliban, properly loathsome and with gnarly intent, while also doubling as a twitchy, ambitious Antonio. Emily Kitchens bubbles

and pleases with her loopy Miranda, then spins behind the set's ravaged netting and steel beams to reappear—all intellect and repressed interior motives, as Sebastian. Even Moreland has a turn at the game, shedding his spritely self to become a Frank Sinatra knockoff in one hilarious scene.

The costumes, from feather-filled capes to turkey platter helmets, deserve a standing ovation of their own. Oliver captures the playwright's humor, shakes it fiercely by the tail, and sends it spinning.

Ultimately, the most compelling tension resonates and revolves around Ariel and her quest to please Prospero and gain her freedom. With the lead character rendered less vibrant, Moscone's *Tempest* is set askew, but by no means shipwrecked. With a cast of enormous talent, unforgettable moments like Shuch's frothy dance in Oliver's magical butterfly dress, Cal Shakes' season opener offers temptations sweet and is not to be missed.

The Tempest, by William Shakespeare; presented by California Shakespeare Theater, runs through June 24.

Where: California Shakespeare Theater, Bruns Amphitheater, 100 California Shakespeare Theater Way (off Highway 24), Orinda

Running time: 2 hours 40 minutes, one intermission

Tickets: \$20-\$48; (510) 548-9666, www.calshakes.org

Lamorinda 4th of July Parade Salutes Veterans

Submitted by Mark Roberts



Veteran in last years parade

Photo Ohlen Alexander

In keeping with this year's 29th annual Lamorinda 4th of July Parade and Celebration theme, Saluting All Veterans, veterans from all conflicts, from World War II through the Iraq/Afghanistan conflict, are invited to march or ride in the parade. Title sponsor Orinda Motors is providing

a large number of convertibles for veterans, but more are needed.

Festivities will start at 7:50 a.m. Wednesday, July 4, with the flag raising in front of the Orinda Community Center followed at 8 a.m. by Fun Runs. A pancake breakfast will be available from 7 until 10 a.m. in

the Community Center. Parade assembly for all participants is at 9 a.m. in the Orinda BART station parking lot on the east side of Camino Pablo. The parade starts there at 10 a.m., follows a course through the business districts on both sides of Highway 24 and concludes by 11:30 a.m. in front of the Community Center. The celebration then continues in the Community Center Park with musical entertainment, children's activities and displays by community service and non-profit groups. Food and beverages will be available for sale.

For more information, veterans are asked to contact Terry Murphy of the local VFW post at (925) 285-1510 or terry.murphy2@comcast.net. For general information about the parade and celebration, please contact the Orinda Association at (925) 254-0800 or oa@orindaassociation.org.

This event is presented by the Orinda Association in partnership with the Orinda Community Foundation and is sponsored by Orinda Motors, Mechanics Bank, the Orinda Chamber of Commerce and the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce.

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