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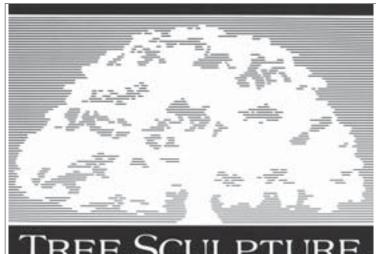
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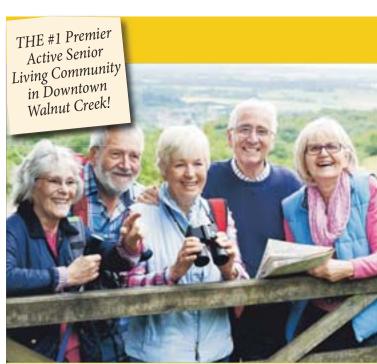
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"The War of the Roses" an epic production at Cal Shakes

By Lou Fancher

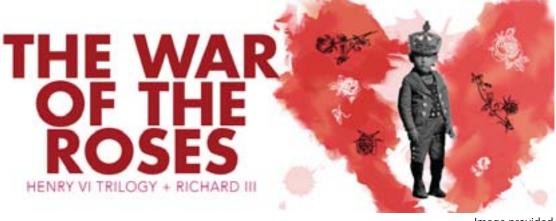


Image provided

Roses" at Cal Shakes makes four hours in the company of tyrannical, villainous, evil, vengeful characters whose specialties are butchery and betrayal a desirable outing. Directed by Artistic Director Eric Ting, who with dramaturg Philippa Kelly adapted and combines Shakespeare's "Henry VI" trilogy and "Richard III," the production bristles with intrigue while blazing through 15th century English history from the end of the Middle Ages to the Tudor reign.

Ultimately, the question as to why Ting aimed his sites at producing four plays in one is far less intriguing than a second question: Does it work?

Largely, yes. On several

Although Shakespeare himself took some liberties with facts relying only on the plays for learning English history would be like picking up American history entirely from Twitter or Hollywood films - War of Roses' condensed history plays are an adequate if imperfect entry point for those whose historical awareness is lacking. Suffice it to say there are kings, queens, dukes, duchesses and government and church dignitaries whose rivalries to gain or retain power exploit soldiers, citizens and often, their closest family members. Audiences get the gist, which is enough to know a foul odor emanates from the channels of oligar-

and multiple role casting. Actors balance each other so that each is spectacular but no one person steals the shine from another actor, and a versatile set design (Nina Ball) instantly brackets both past and future. The overhanging "cage" bears modern style subtitles and name labels to assist in following the complexities of plot and characters. There is a skipping stone feel to Costumes (Anna R. Oliver) and lighting design (Jiyoun Chang) extend and magnify themes related to class, competition, ghostly afterlife, violence and in a previous production, had aupeace. There's even live electronic music (Josh Pollock) that instead of focusing on the stage adds gritty, contemporary edginess throughout the production.

voice to women in ways that traditional versions tend not to, especially developing the arc of Queen Margaret, "War of the Roses" deepens understanding. Not only that, but the ghostly mothers who haunt and throw curses upon Richard III, having received fuller profiles in Act I, become not just vengeful spirits but real souls whose pain resonates with extra intensity. It's not just fine acting that produces this result; it's time and careful directorial and script considerations courtesy of Ting and Kelly.

But it is an homage to language where the production most excels. Credit Kelly to large extent (and come early to

The production hosts a bold her pre-show chats for an extra cast with the chops to barrel into treat). The script is soaked with counter-type, gender crossover, Shakespeare's gems that emerge like brilliant showstoppers out of the confusion of names, titles and family feuding: "Things ill-got have ever-bad success," or "Virtue is choked by foul ambition." And the Duke of York's description of Queen Margaret's "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide." And many more.

The production is not perfect. the first act and a recent trend to have disembodied voices broadcast from speakers in the back of the amphitheater., which worked diences searching for the source at crucial moments.

As a four-hour experience, Because the play gives more however, "The War of the Roses" offers a parallel thinker ideas to take away. Is leadership a corrupting force? Are alliances doomed to fail? Will a marriage founded on fortune ever result in love? What forces will trust, kindness and allegiance endure and which ones will cause them to tumble and fail? But mostly, the remarkable afterthought is how much fun it has been to be in the company of truly creepy people.

> The Cal Shakes production, "The War of the Roses," runs through Sept. 15 at the Bruns Amphitheater in Orinda. tickets or information, visit www.calshakes.org.

SMC students continue a colorful tradition

Submitted by Kay Carney

chy and patriarchy.



Photo Haley Nelson

and 160 transfer students moved into their residence halls at Saint Mary's College Aug. 23, with the day kicking off the College's annual Weekend of Welcome for new and returning students. In keeping with the Saint halls was the first of many activi-Mary's tradition of service, more than 100 student volunteers comprised of sophomores, juniors,

ore than 650 first-year and seniors helped out new Gaels most photogenic and physically by swooping in to unload cars, carry boxes of school supplies and personal effects, and help the new on-campus home.

Moving into the residence ties spanning four days, steeped with games, a carnival, resource fair, pool party, and perhaps the letters, but each other as well.

engaging activity – the distinctly sloppy and fun "Paint the SMC" event, which happened Aug. 25. new students transition into their A longtime SMC tradition, students hiked up the hill to paint the large SMC letters that overlook campus. No brushes were allowed. Students used only their hands to paint not only the SMC

Submit stories and story ideas to

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