

Not-So-Royal Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'

[Hanna Kennedy](#) | Friday, April 20, 2018



“O, wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, / That has such people in’t.”

This “brave new world” comes to life in the Not-So-Royal Shakespeare Company’s spring production, “The Tempest.”

Filled with magic, sea storms and spectacle, “The Tempest” is the story of Prospero, his daughter and the survivors of a shipwreck, including the king of Naples, his son and other members of the court.

The play begins in the midst of a storm. The theater is dark, except for a dim, blue light focused on Prospero (Michael Vaclav), alone on stage. Down on one knee, wooden staff in hand and drawing strange patterns on the floor, the audience is lured in by the mysterious display at hand. Violins accompanied by haunting voices begin in the background, broken suddenly by the screaming and swaying of the actors as a storm envelops their ship. Audience members catch themselves tensing up, overwhelmed and unnerved by the sudden chaos that consumes the stage.

The confusion cuts to Miranda (Salem Murray) and Prospero on the island. Prospero explains to his daughter that he created the storm and caused the shipwreck. The scene between father and daughter lacks the technical drama that preceded it but ushers in an intensity of emotion. The scene’s simplicity allows the audience to focus on the connection between the characters and the dialogue that propels the plot forward. The show, as a whole, is characterized by these transitions between performances of intense technical flare and others of modest staging, but powerful acting.

The plot of “The Tempest” is a complicated one, but director, Caitlin Crosby, stages it simply. The Washington Hall black-box theater can be seen one of two ways: a blank canvas ready for creative interpretation or a black hole, void and impossible to fill. Crosby, lucky for the

audience, viewed it as the former. The set is strictly black and white; streamers hang in the background and chalk patterns the floor. The production's unusually simple set-up allows Shakespeare's language and the actors' interpretation to take center stage.

Not-So-Royal performances feature consistently excellent acting. Michael Vaclav, a second year Master's student in English literature, shines as Prospero. His body language, posture and line delivery all show a real investment in the character and contribute to his captivating on-stage presence.

Comic relief comes in the form of Stephano (Nicholas Taylor) and Trinculo (Ellis Sargeant), the king of Naples' drunken butler and court jester, respectively. The two standard Shakespearean fools interact with the audience, making eye contact and offering sly smiles. Their words, actions and unique relationship highlight the conspiratorial world of the play, in addition to providing humor.

It is the little details, more than anything, that make Not-So-Royal's rendition of "The Tempest" a joy to watch. Prospero stands towards the back of the stage, rolling his eyes and smirking as he looks on, unnoticed, watching Miranda and Ferdinand (Joseph Crowley) smile, blush and flirt. The young couple is seen again oblivious, playing a game of cards as the shipwrecked noblemen confront Prospero before the final reconciliation. Thoughtful additions like these show the actors' commitment to their roles and Crosby's thorough, creative approach to directing.

The remaining showtimes are Friday, April 20th at 7:30pm and Saturday, April 21st at 4 p.m. Be sure not to miss the Not-So-Royal Shakespeare Company's impressive take on the Bard's final solo play.

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