

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

The Tempest

William Shakespeare

Theatre Royal Plymouth on tour at Nottingham Theatre Royal and then Norwich Theatre Royal
(ends November 23rd)
(2002)

Ask television viewers how they perceive Richard Briers and most will undoubtedly refer to his triumphs over four decades in the field of comedy. But theatregoers who have seen him in the West End in Ibsen, Shaw, Coward and Ayckbourn realise he is far more versatile.

Consider his Prospero in Shakespeare's final play *The Tempest*, a story of revenge, restitution and reckoning. It's a demanding role and, like Lear, needs a highly experienced veteran to pull it off. The 68-year-old Briers succeeds admirably in Patrick Mason's production, going through a gamut of emotions from anger and indignation to tenderness, passion and eventually forgiveness, albeit reluctantly.

His Prospero performs no tricks, doesn't break his staff and his "magic garment" is not especially lavish. Add the simplistic, almost minimalist costumes of the rest of the cast and you can see that this production concentrates on the text. Briers obviously approves as he recites his lines with clarity, warmth and deference to the Bard.

Francis O'Connor's design is functional yet slightly puzzling, the whole set resembling a giant swimming pool. It seems appropriate for the shipwreck at the start of the play -a difficult scene brought to life by co-ordinated lurches across the stage. But it appears out of place for the isle which is "full of noises, sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not." However, the high diving board makes a suitable platform on which Prospero and Ariel can survey the action taking place below them.

Ben Silverstone's Ariel who usually wears his own cloak when carrying out his master's orders has only one scene in which he dons wings and appears spectacularly from above. Again the emphasis is on the words, spoken lucidly and emotionally.

As for Caliban, Rory Kinnear, son of the late Roy, is not the abominable or ridiculous monster Shakespeare refers to. Instead he is as much repressed as evil and comes over as a gullible, pitiable creature.

Comedy in *The Tempest* revolves around the drunken Stephano and Trinculo. Stephen Casey and Darren Tunstall extract every possible laugh out of the text and more besides as the pace never slackens when they are on stage.

Another veteran, William Russell, is outstanding as Gonzalo, retaining a detached air of decorum as he is the object of Antonio's (Crispin Redman) and Sebastian's (Tristram Wymark) sneering.

Madeleine Worrall as Miranda perhaps could have appeared more innocent bearing in mind that she had seen only two other men before she espies Ferdinand. Orlando Wells is superb as the

king's son, extracting more out of the part than I've ever seen before.

Ferdinand can be a wimpish part, his only occupation being to rival Tony Blackburn on *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here* by collecting as many logs as possible. Wells stamps his authority on the role, his interpretation being full of enthusiasm and optimism.

Virtually all the characters might have shown more grief for the loss of loved ones in the initial storm. But on the whole it is a polished, enjoyable production. Briers admitted on local radio that the presentation has changed from the initial production. Theatregoers who saw it early in its run may have found it a tempestuous watch, but those who see it in its final weeks will experience a journey through less troubled waters.

Reviewer: [Steve Orme](#)