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Review: The Festival d'Avignon Presents LA TEMPESTA By Alessandro Serra



The classic elements to create an effective magical illusion are smoke and mirrors. There might not be mirrors, but there is a great deal of smoke throughout Alessandro Serra's production of Shakespeare's *La Tempesta* (*The Tempest*), now in performance in Avignon's Opera House. This ubiquitous fog assists in creating many sublime illusions. Though for those who find Shakespeare enticing for pathos as well as panache, this fog blurs performances. With their faces obscured by fog and chiaroscuro lighting, Serra's take on *The Tempest* is an enchanting puppet piece.

The Tempest is already perhaps Shakespeare's most elemental work. It is his third shortest play and plot elements tend to layer upon one another without much integration of the elements. The lover's plot exists in one space, the fool's another, and the powerful men of Italy are isolated in a third. These separate elements exist in distinct numerical categories too. The lovers have two individuals, the fools three, and powerful men four. Serra takes advantage of this with simple dancerly images. On the stage Serra has placed a square wooden platform. This platform is surrounded by large black walls that can shift for entrances and exits with cinematic ease.

Alessandro Serra is credited with translation, adaptation, direction, set, costume, lighting, and sound design. This final element might be the most stunning, as it shakes the opera house, first with sounds of the sea and then later with stirring music. All design elements are masterfully controlled, as if one wrong syllable and the entire magical spell is lost. Appraisal of the on stage human performances is less easy. One of the few thematically charged moments comes when, in English, Jared McNeil as Caliban says "Was I, to take this drunkard

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for a god, And worship this dull fool!" This moment is perhaps the only hint to the hidden moral complexities and depths of the play.

Serra's production begins with perhaps the most striking image of the work, the tempest itself. Ariel dances beneath a stage sized sheet that convulses above her as she dances. The lighting and sound tells us we are beneath the waves and the wreckage. It is a spellbinding, vivid, and convincing illusion. It also couldn't be simpler. So much of Serra's beautiful imagery convinces the eye with a mix of exactness and simplicity. Like the tempest itself, such images overwhelm the characters that exist within them.

Auteur : Wesley Doucette

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