



Stage Kiss

Reviewed by David Tenenbaum



In *Stage Kiss*, directed by Jon Stancato and now playing at The Red Room, The Stolen Chair Theatre Company continues its production of salacious as well as cerebral historical drama. In keeping with the spirit of a previous production, *Commedia dell'Artemisia*, *Stage Kiss* presents a comedic, offbeat, rendition of another famous gender conflict. The talented Kiran Rikhye has turned in a brilliantly sculpted script based on John Lily's play *Gallathea*. Her ability to capture Renaissance style through original verse in Sixteenth Century language, as seen in "*Commedia dell'Artemisia*," emerges once more in dialogue that is as true to the form of the Elizabethan stage as the work that it is based on.

Jon Campbell delivers a triumphant performance as the fierce and lustful Neptune in search of a virgin sacrifice. Continuing in the tradition of his other previous roles as a sultry womanizer, Campbell brims with bravado as he challenges the defiant Venus (Layna Fisher) whose jealousy sparks a conflict between them. Campbell speaks as effectively through his eyebrows as through his bombastic Olympian bellows. Fisher herself struts sensually across the stage as the licentious goddess of love, bringing the arrogant Neptune down to "size" with her own sexual prowess and quick wit. Both Campbell and Fisher promote the theme of the gender-bent comedy in their respective roles as Veneria and Puritanus, two apprehensive parents who disguise their daughters as men to

save them from the clutches of the lecherous sea god.

Stancato's decision to cast Gallathea as a man adds to the farcical nature of the play. Cameron Oro has the audience in stitches through most of the show with his dulcet tones, diffidence, and imitations of a woman imitating the physical gestures of his own gender. Alexia Vernon, another Stolen Chair veteran, gives a charming performance as Phyllida, the other young maiden who disguises herself as a swarthy gentleman and finds herself enraptured by Gallathea hiding from Neptune in the same manner. Vernon's swagger increases the comedic element of the play as she and Gallathea, an "adventurer" and a "hunter," find themselves unable to catch or cook any food in the forest.

The show brims with subtle jibes at the fallacies of gender construction. The love that develops between the two young girls is in no way diminished by the discovery that they are both female. When Venus endows the two girls with "what they lack" to escape Neptune's appetite, they are as equally enamored with one another as they had been even upon their shocking recognition of their common sex. In "*Stage Kiss*," even the frustrated Neptune demonstrates a divine open-mindedness as he joins his adversary Venus in blessing "love in all attire."