



Stolen Chair **On STAGE**

www.stolenchair.org

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTEMISIA

reviewed by Aaron Riccio (6/27/07)

PBS' New Theater Corps

By the time you read this, *Commedia Dell' Artemisia's* all-too-brief revival at Collective:Unconscious will be over, but in the hopes that they'll really nurture their already burgeoning ode to classical, rhyming comedy (and keep their skilled, energetic actors busy), it's important that this newly written old-school hit be recognized.

That rape could be funny, not tragic, who knew? The producers and writers of *Stolen Chair*, that's who. With swagger and grace and a man who's ribald, the show woos us and flatters us, we're never appalled. *Commedia Dell' Artemisia*, what a wonderful name; if only bringing back classical comedy alone brought one fame. But I'll drop the old rhymes now (they're far better than me), as I must stress the point that this show's a must see. (Besides, it's not as easy to rhyme David Bengali's name as you'd think, nor Cameron J. Oro's, Layna Fisher's, or Liza Wade White's, all of whom are well worth mentioning.)

Like typical works of *commedia dell' arte* (think Moliere), Kiran Rikhye's taken what could be a tragedy (the historical rape of Artemisia Gentileschi) and made it into a comedy -- an old-school (for wives) affair, with rhyming couplets, slimming corsets, and masks, too. Follow the innocent yet willful Artemisia (the isabella) as she tries to escape her doting, daft painter of a father, Orazio (the pantalone), by accepting the advances of the lusty Agostino Tassi (il capitano). This is done at the behest of her more...ahem...experienced chaperon, Tuzia (the

columbina), whose wide-eyed gapes are perfect for the double-takes required of her stock part.

Jon Stancato's direction is filled with little nuances of the form, and when he can squeeze in an extra pratfall or continue a running gag (an accidental grope, an intentional ass slap), he does so with panache. He also handles his actors well (courtesy of designer Jonathan Becker): Bengali slouches his way up from the earth into his mask, notching his head to call out in high-pitched befuddlement, and Oro finds a nice comedic clash by mixing a sincere gravitas in his posture with the monkey-like face he's wearing. On the feminine side, the ladies are lovely, their porcelain makeup giving a nice contrast with their zestier, full-bodied performances: Tuzia's a bit underwritten, which is unfortunate for the talented Fisher (she makes up for it with her body language), but White gets to play both the innamorata and the dottore, and relishes in her long-winded spiels as a drunk judge (think *Boston Legal: The 1600s*).

The only sad part about *Commedia Dell' Artemisia* is that it's condensed to stay under an hour, which means there's no romance and no real comeuppance. The climax simply dissolves into a bawdy song with a hasty conclusion: I say, if you've got it, flaunt it, and there's no reason the *Stolen Chair Theatre Company* can't turn this one-act into an even bigger crowd pleaser.