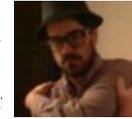


Beware the Ides of March

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Ten Bucks Julius Caesar

Caesar and his train: Willow Yerxa as Portia, Moria Beale as Calpurnia, Nathan Roach as Caesar, Julie Arnold Lisnet as Mark Antony, Andrea Herson Littlefield as Publius, and Greg Littlefield as Popilius Lena

Ten Bucks Theatre presents 'Julius Caesar'

BREWER – The dogs of war are being set loose at Brewer's Indian Trail Park.

Ten Bucks Theatre Company is back with their annual presentation of Shakespeare Under the Stars. This year's production is "Julius Caesar," directed by Ben Layman. The show runs for one more weekend at the park – July 24-27 – before moving to Fort Knox for performances on July 31 and Aug. 1-3. All tickets are \$10.

Julius Caesar (Nathan Roach) has made his triumphant return from the battlefield alongside his trusted lieutenant Marc Antony (Julie Arnold Lisnet). The citizens of Rome aim to celebrate their victorious leader by crowning him king – an honor he conspicuously refuses. Caesar is issued a portentous warning by a soothsayer (John Danico), who counsels that Caesar should beware the Ides of March. Said warning largely falls on deaf ears.

Meanwhile, there is a contingent that is less enthusiastic about their nation's newfound hero. Senators Brutus (Adam Cousins) and Cassius (Katie Toole) harbor suspicions about Caesar's ambition – suspicions that prompt them to start seeking out fellow travelers in a plot to thwart Caesar's ascension. Casca (Jordan Lorenz), Cinna (Heather Dunbar) and others join the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar, though only Brutus's motivations are pure.

Despite the ominous dreams of Caesar's wife Calpurnia (Moria Beale) and the exhortations of Brutus's wife Portia (Nicolette Willow Yerxa), the conspiracy carries forward to its inevitable and murderous conclusion. Much to the dismay of Brutus and the rest of the cabal, many Romans are enraged by rather than grateful for the group's actions. In fact, thanks in large part to the rousing words of Marc Antony, the nation's citizens turn upon themselves and war comes to Rome once more.

And as with all wars, much blood is shed.

There's a complexity to all of Shakespeare's works that can make them seem intimidating to a modern audience. However, the truth is that there's a universality to the Bard's tales that makes them far more accessible than one might initially believe. For instance, "Julius Caesar" is in many ways a precursor to the modern political thriller, with all of the machinations and manipulations inherent to that genre (though the stabbing tends to be more literal than figurative in Shakespeare's story).

Ten Bucks has long had a tradition of maximizing that accessibility with the works that they present; this one is no exception. Director Ben Layman has assembled an excellent ensemble, one capable of telling the story in such a way as to allow audiences of any level of Shakespearean exposure to be swept up into this compelling narrative. Mining the meaning from the text is a major key to the success of any classical production – Layman and the cast manage the feat with seeming effortlessness.

Shakespeare's works make high demands of their performers; "Julius Caesar" is no exception. And for the most part, the cast acquits themselves well. Cousins wears Brutus's conflicting feelings well, lending voice to the turmoil of a man who simply wants what's best for the citizenry. Arnold lends Marc Antony a compelling reserve, making the character's eventual rhetorical explosiveness that much more effective. Toole informs Cassius with a sense of underhanded malevolence, while Lorenz's Casca carries a brutishness that juxtaposes nicely with the more intellectually driven conspirators. And Roach is suitably imperious as the titular Caesar, showing us the sort of man whose rule a nation might crave.

The rest of the Roman populace engages as well; the ensemble as a whole – with some actors doing double or triple duty – creates a fascinating picture of a Rome united, then divided. Whether the rabble is being roused or battle is being waged, each and every actor is unfailingly committed to the cause. Special mention should be made of Haus of Paradigm, the belly dance troupe directed by Ao Arts. The dancers of the Haus accompany the Soothsayer throughout and lend a marvelous and eye-catching sense of atmosphere, managing somehow to appear both ethereal and substantial simultaneously and generally offering sensations of the supernatural with every appearance.

There's something magical about watching Shakespeare outside; the pastoral setting lends itself to a deeper connection to the material. Area arts lovers should consider themselves lucky that Ten Bucks continues to bring the Bard to life in Brewer. There are few better ways to while away a summer evening. So make an effort to join the troupe as they relate this tale of conspiracy and betrayal.

And remember – beware the Ides of March.

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