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Arts Abroad

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22 January 2016

*As You Like It*

I am a huge fan of William Shakespeare's works, although I have not yet had the opportunity to read them all. *As You Like It* is, unfortunately, one of the plays I was unfamiliar with. I'm typically a fan of modernizing Shakespeare because I enjoy seeing the artistic choices that directors make, but the first scene of this particular adaptation did not sit well with me. After the first scene, I thought the play really picked up and I appreciated the modern, artistic creation of the forest. I thought it was very well done after the first scene, from the actors' performances to the set design to how well the stage was utilized.

When we first arrived in the theatre seats, I thought there was some confusion. The set looked like it could be set up for *Wonder.Land* with all the computers present and bright, obnoxious colors. The only detail that kept me thinking it might be *As You Like It* was that all the screensavers on the computers were of trees and forests. I felt that this entire first part of the play was stiff and confusing. There were far more people on the stage than necessary and there was too much movement. I did not know whom to watch. I especially disliked how they adapted the wrestling scene to resemble a WWE wrestling match. I thought that was particularly over the top and an abomination of Shakespeare's work. I do not think he ever would have portrayed that scene with such juvenile theatrics. They

selected a hugely overweight African American man to take on a rather small Caucasian man and this seemed very inappropriate and culturally insensitive to me. I literally could not focus on the content of the play because I was so distracted by all the chaos that was happening on stage.

Once the first scene began to transition, however, I became entranced. That was probably the coolest scene transition that I have ever seen. Watching all the tables and chairs being slowly lifted from the floor was mesmerizing. I was not sure if they were going to be removed completely, but I was so satisfied when they were used to represent the forest. I also loved that they had actors sitting on suspended chairs in the chaos of the forest. It was a very cool stylistic choice to have people create all the sounds of the forest. We were nearly eye level with some of the actors who created the background sounds and it was interesting to watch them sometimes. They were all dressed in black and I saw one of them reading a book between her cues. It was cute. I thought they did a wonderful job, though. They were so discreet yet so present and very effective at creating the ambiance of the forest.

The acting in the play was phenomenal, I felt. I think the actors genuinely understood the struggles of their characters and were able to give a slightly modern twist to them with their body language and facial expressions. It was fun to witness this interpretation. They were all well cast, also. The more modern costumes were a nice touch as well. Clearly this adaptation of the play did not take place in the Elizabethan era and it is not quite clear exactly when this play is supposed to take place, (perhaps in some sort of dystopian society with fancy suits and an abundance

of computers) but the clothing in the forest scenes had a sort of timelessness. I never once questioned the time period, which was interesting and refreshing. I felt that nobody was really trying to fit into the Elizabethan mold, like so many Shakespeare dramatists often do, which was a very positive aspect.

Overall, I really enjoyed this production of *As You Like It*. While I was put off at first by the opening scene, which I believe really did not work, the rest of the play redeemed itself and I left with a positive disposition. I liked the chemistry that the actors had and I felt that the entire forest set was one of the most unique and well-designed sets I have ever had the privilege of seeing. This was certainly a once-in-a-lifetime production of *As You Like It* and I am just sad that my older brother did not get to see it because he is a technical director for a theatre and I know he would have appreciated it greatly.

I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity and means to travel on Arts Abroad twice throughout my four years at Rider because I have been exposed to so many different cultural and theatrical productions and performances. Each one has helped me to grow as a human being and I know that I will continue to grow now that I have been bitten by the travel and theatre bugs. My appreciation for the arts has developed immensely and I am so happy that I have toured such wonderful theatres as the Globe and the National Theatre. Thank you, Patty Poo, for granting me these unforgettable experiences. I have learned so much from you over the last few years and there are not enough words to thank you. I promise to do my best to visit you next January (because, let's face it, you and Jer-Bear love doing Arts Abroad

too much) and I promise to keep in touch. Thank you again for everything. It has been a real honor and pleasure to learn from you.