

As You Like It (A New Adaptation)



Strangeloop Theatre (see Fringe & storefront). By William Shakespeare. Adapted by Letitia Guillaud. Dir. Brad Gunter. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 20mins; one intermission.

At the preshow announcement of Letitia Guillaud's new adaptation of *As You Like It*, the fool Touchstone (Peter Robards) comes out and tests an old theater superstition. "Macbeth," he says, noting that nothing bad happens when he says the word. But the show has yet to begin.

Local improviser Guillaud's adaptation starts in Shakespeare's verse, but once the love-struck characters enter the Forest of Arden, they use modern language. Composed from rehearsal improvisations, the updated dialogue sounds like *No Fear Shakespeare* with more ums. The actors aren't completely comfortable with the adapted text; Act II, set entirely in Arden, moves with a sluggish pace that makes it seem as if the ensemble is still improvising. The vocals lack energy; at the end of the classic "All the world's a stage" speech, Holly Robison's Jacques trails off and the final words are lost.

Some of the modern flourishes are clever—the Kinks' transvestite love letter "Lola" is sung in the second act—but when the language switches over, the dramatic interest of the story disappears. Minus Shakespeare's poetry, Orlando (Tom Kaehny) and Rosalind's (Emily Harpe) romance has the emotional stakes of an Adam Sandler film. As cross-dressing Rosalind and her cousin Celia, Harpe and Stevie Chaddock Lambert come close to redeeming the production with their relaxed chemistry and control of (what's left of) Shakespeare's verse.—*Oliver Sava*

SHOW OF THE WEEK



IN CUR, THE WRATH Anderson barks up a tree.

Chesapeake

It's been a turbulent year for Remy Bumpo, which gained and lost an artistic director in a matter of months; Lee Blessing's 1999 one-man show makes for a safe, pleasant closer for a rocky season. Ensemble member Greg Matthew Anderson stars as Kerr, a performance artist who dognaps a local senator's Chesapeake Bay retriever, Lucky, when his NEA funding is threatened. Kerr bungles the crime and dies with Lucky, but finds himself reborn as another dog from Lucky's litter who's been given the name and position of his deceased sibling.



Remy Bumpo Theatre Company (see Resident companies). By Lee Blessing. Dir. Shawn Douglass. With Greg Matthew Anderson. 2hrs; one intermission.

Freaky Friday with a political twist, Blessing's play preaches empathy between liberals and conservatives but takes too long getting to the action. After a brief introduction to Sen. Thermal "Therm" Pooley and his problematic pet, Kerr oddly segues into his relationship with his father and the history of his Futurist

inspiration Filippo Marinetti. This big chunk of exposition makes for a slow start, but once Kerr undergoes his magical transformation, the production picks up.

With just a single stool as his set, Anderson creates a rich environment through his narration. He's adept at giving characters distinct voices and physicalities, allowing him to have captivating conversations with himself. Shawn Douglass's staging keeps the actor in motion; clever touches like Kerr lapping up a glass of water illustrate his transition from Pooley's biggest enemy to his new best friend.—*Oliver Sava*

Re-Spiced: A Silk Road Cabaret



Silk Road Rising (see Cabaret & variety). Conceived by Jamil Khoury. Dir. Steve Scott. With ensemble cast. 1hr 35mins; no intermission.

In 2009, Silk Road artistic director Jamil Khoury devised *Silk Road Cabaret: Broadway Sings the Silk Road*, in which performers of Asian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean descent took on numbers from Broadway musicals like *The King and I*, *South Pacific* and *Flower Drum Song*, often giving them an ironic twist. These acts of

reclamation were interspersed with personal stories about the intersections of the performers' ethnic identities and their careers in the theater.

Khoury's new cabaret broadens the scope. The basic setup remains that of Eastern-descent actors reappropriating Western material about the Orient and the Middle East. But Khoury extends his reach into pop, rock, hip-hop and Tin Pan Alley, while the prose passages here are taken from literary sources.

The blatant exoticism of *South Pacific*'s "Bali Hai" may seem obvious. But when it's threaded together with musings on the region and its peoples by everyone from Edith Wharton to

Weezer and William S. Burroughs to Ice Cube, Khoury, dramaturg Neal Ryan Shaw and director Steve Scott draw a compelling through line of the West's long history of alternately fetishizing and fearing those "unimagined lands." A winning cast of eight ably sells both that story and Ryan Brewster's accomplished arrangements, which offer musical satisfaction as well as a lyrical clarity that allows us to ponder anew the amiable tone deafness of "Walk Like an Egyptian" and the xenophobic malevolence of Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue."—*Kris Vire*



SPICE PACK Silk Road's cast savors the moment.

PHOTOS: TOP, JOHNNY KNIGHT; BOTTOM, MICHAEL BROSILOW