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Theater: Bebe Neuwirth Still Looks Dreamy in "Midsummer"

Posted: 05/14/2012 1:54 pm

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SHARE THIS STORY

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The Classic Stage Company's production of Shakespeare's bauble *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has an eye-catching set and an eye-catching cast in various

stages of undress. If you've ever wanted to see an Abercrombie & Fitch model recite verse in their underwear (and who hasn't?), this is the show for you. Run and catch it before it closes on May 20. But the visage you're most likely to remember is that of the lithe and self-assured Bebe Neuwirth, commanding both physically and theatrically in dual roles as the fairy queen Titania and the slightly morose Hippolyta. She moves with grace and speaks her lines with authority, matched moment to moment by Anthony Heald's Oberon/Theseus (a very lucky man, indeed).

I'd say Neuwirth is sexy despite the costumes of Andrea Lauer. Shakespeare's tale of young lovers put at cross purposes by a mischief-making Puck (an over-exuberant Taylor Mac) is certainly one that encourages a free spirit in all areas. But her costumes are a little broad and jokey for my taste, even in this context. Still, Neuwirth looks wonderful, even in a silly leather dominatrix outfit.

I certainly won't fault Lauer for stripping the lovers down to their smalls. It's a good way of distracting us from the fact that Christina Ricci, Nick Gehlfuss, Jordan Dean and Halley Wegryn Gross are all more confident cavorting about than turning the verse of Shakespeare into natural-seeming dialogue.

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That's presumably why director Tony Speciale has them bouncing about and wrestling and tackling and tumbling over one another throughout the long night where lover after lover is bewitched into switching their passion. Equally broad are the rude mechanicals, the local buffoons led by Nick Bottom (Steven Skybell) who simply want to rehearse their woebegone play in the woods, only to have Bottom turned into an ass and become the paramour of Titania.

This is not a production for insight but it is handsomely mounted. The set design by Mark Wendland is especially striking. It features a wall of mirrors tilting gently over the stage and beautiful touches like a shower of flower petals that also became amusingly bounteous at one point. The lighting and sound by Tyler Micoleau and M. Florian Staab worked together seamlessly to create the pastoral magic this work calls for.

A special round of applause for the music of Christian Frederickson and Ryan Rumery. Songs are peppered throughout the play and I've rarely heard them given such beautiful musical settings or sung so well as they are here. (On a similar note, Jordan Dean has a very amusing running gag as Demetrius where he delivers some of his lines in a quavering, r&b crooner style; a goofily funny touch that wasn't overdone.) When it sings, this *Midsummer* soars, but even at its most earth-bound it's an amiable night of theater.

The Theater Season 2011-2012 (on a four-star scale)

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review.

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Well..... a picture of Bebe would have been nice.

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Michael Giltz
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02:53 PM on 05/15/2012

I agree! They didn't post any video with Neuwirth in it so I had none to share, I'm afraid.

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