

Bridge Street Theater, Catskill, NY

Rude Mechanics by Eric Hissom. Directed by Eric Hissom.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“Curb your gouts and fears.”

Did Shakespeare really write “The Tempest” or was it cribbed from someone else’s work? That is NOT the subject of this new play but the question is part of the plot, or the story or the concept. What and when is it? It is 1613. Queen Elizabeth is dead and King James and his dull wife are on the throne and attending a performance by The King’s Men of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” in which an understudy, Julian Crosse, with very little rehearsal is going on as Flute who plays Thisbe in the play with the play. He needs to rehearse his monologue and death scene and he gets little help from his compatriots. This is a comedy, a high comedy, with more laughs than anticipated. More laughs than usual these days. So much more, thank goodness.



Em Whitworth as Rosemary, Steven Patterson as Shakespeare, Jack Rento as Julian, Andrew Goehring as Henry; Photo: John Sowle

Bridge Street Theatre in Catskill, NY is presenting another world premiere, Eric Hissom’s “Rude Mechanics” for a brief two-week run. It is so good, the cast is so good, that it should run for months but since it won’t you need to see it now. The four actors in the show play seven roles, three of them by Steven Patterson, and the work they do on stage is dynamic,

dramatic, quixotic and hysteric. As the third of my Shakespeare outings this week (Capital Rep's "Midsummer..." and Hartford Stage's "Winter's Tale") this being so good was the last thing I expected. However, Hissom's play stands up well next to the other two seen so recently. In fact, every theater doing Shakespeare should add this play to its repertoire.

As the understudy Julian Jack Rento turns in a bravura performance which seems to never pause for breath. Julian is searching desperately for a key to the role of Thisbe and he finds, instead, a key to life as the illegitimate son of an important professional forbear. Rento gives the man's desperation constant reality and humor simultaneously, a tribute to the young actor making his company debut with this role.



Em Whitworth. Andrew Goehring;
Photo:John Sowle



Steven Patterson as Lord Strayte, Jack Rento as Julian; Photo: John Sowle

As Rosemary Bassanio Em Whitworth delivers a very amusing look at the anticipated and unanticipated role of women in Shakespeare's England. In this, her debut role with the company, she gives us an instant desire to see her again in another role with which she can impress us even more. Here she has the opportunity to play the passion of a creative spirit who is forced into an uncomfortable niche that imprisons her. Rosemary wants so much that she can only get as a surrogate. Passion is the right word for Whitworth's performance. Rento plays desperation and need; Whitworth plays desire and talent. Her character is both needy and giving.

Andrew Goehring plays actor Henry Worthy, a character unworthy to enjoy the favors of Rosemary or the admiration of Julian, yet he has both. This character may well be a composite of John Underwood and William Ostler, both prominent players in *The King's Men* at this time. A figure more of ego than of accomplishment Henry Worthy is both unpleasant and highly amusing as his self-confidence tends to overwhelm Julian and Rosemary. Though he slowly burns out his inner light in the presence of the great playwright/actor/producer Shakespeare, Goehring makes Henry a fascinating character. This is also his debut with the company.

Once again Steven Patterson pulls off a coup on this stage, playing three utterly fascinating people, including a ghost - a character not listed in the program. He begins the play as Lord Strayte, the supervisor of the Queen's Theater. Strayte is pissy, pretentious, perilously close

to a mental breakdown. He sets the tone for the comic language to come and also establishes the pace of the play. He returns midway through the piece as a very drunk William Shakespeare and proceeds to dominate what follows as each other character has much need for this aging Will. The actor's Shakespeare is dynamic, silly and romantically devastating. He finally appears as the ghost of Queen Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, and finishes the play with a neat flourish and a true sense of finality. It is a very fine trio of performances.

Author/Director Eric Hissom had given us a fine taste of good theater. His play is sound, funny, and dramatically well-realized. If his objective was to entertain he has succeeded. If his reason was to educate us he has done that as well. Though there is nothing really "new" in his script he presents rationales for things we've heard about and seen before,, but in better ways than we've had. I would see this again without a moment of hesitation. It's that good.

John Sowle's sets and lights work well for the play as do the costumes designed by Michelle Rogers. This is a simple and straightforward production well worth spending your time and money on.

+ 04/23/2023 +

Rude Mechanics plays at Bridge Street Theatre, 44 N. Bridge Street, Catskill, NY through April 30. For information and tickets go to bridgestreettheatre.org.



Steven Patterson as the Ghost of Queen Elizabeth I,
Jack Rento as Julian;. Photo: John Sowle