

Chester, Theatre Company, Chester, MA  
*Guards at the Taj*, by Rajiv Joseph. Directed by Reena Dutt.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

**“Nothing so beautiful will ever be built again.”**

Chester Theatre’s second play of the season is about the concept of beauty and its effect on people. That’s all its about; that and, of course, the effect the idea of beauty and it’s value has on those who live and work close to true beauty. It has been said, many times, that the Taj Mahal is the most perfectly beautiful structure in the world and the two characters in this play certainly believe that to be true. They are guards at the Taj and they take their work seriously, sort of. Humayun, played by Ruchir Khazanchi, certainly does. He is devoted to his job and to the emotional connection he has with it. His best friend, Babur, played by Abuzar Farrukh, is not as devoted to his work. He fears the consequences of failing too much, but he can’t help himself from screwing around, fantasizing, playing games. They are a very odd couple, indeed.

When Shah Jahan, the king, decides that nothing shall ever surpass the beauty of the Taj he orders 20,000 men to be beheaded so that they can never again create a structure that might outdo Taj Mahal. This task is assigned to Babur with the assistance of Humayun. And the play about beauty and its



Abuzar Farrukh as Babur, Ruchir Khazanchi as Humayun; Photo: Andrew Greto.

consequences is on. Political, in part, historical at its base, its core is still that appreciation of beauty. Babur sees it within the Shah’s unseen harem; Humayun finds beauty in his work, his awkward appreciation of his father’s position in life. Their long friendship brings them both joy and frustration for neither one truly understands the other.

The play’s physical and verbal comedy is delightful in Scene One, but that is tempered by the circumstances that surround this work. The program notes are extremely helpful, including a glossary and a lineage page which indicate the years in which this very modern sounding play is set. Physically it is a beautiful play to look at, the scenic design work by Travis George is so well

shown off by James McNamara's extraordinary lighting. Costume Designer Oona Natesan has created exquisite clothing for the two characters and the curious Sound Design by Naveen Bhatia creates a world all by itself.



Ruchir Khazanchi; Photo: Andrew Greto

Director Reena Dutt has worked her two actors into exquisite partners who seem to have been together for decades. They are the Abbott and Costello of the play, working off one another with superb timing and an overly complicated relationship. In this play timing means so much and these two actors time their laughs, their shocks, their every intimate moment superbly. Dutt has timed their reactions and fed them approval when they get things right. They are beautiful professionals who make this play even more worthwhile that it might already be.

I read the program after I saw the play which was a mistake on my part. I felt confused by some of the truths in the script so I suggest strongly that you give this show the time it needs. Read ahead and be aware that what you are going to be witnessing here in Chester is a fine, literate compilation of difficult truths about what beauty can do to people. The

beauty of Shah Jahan's wife, Mumtaz Mahal, was memorialized in the Taj Mahal after her untimely death. The complex of buildings is a thing of beauty and, honestly, what is beauty? It can be Hell! It can be Heaven. It can be what it already intrinsically is: Beauty.

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**Guards at the Taj** plays at Chester Town Hall Theater through July 16. For information and tickets go to [chestertheatre.org](http://chestertheatre.org) or call 413-354-7771.