

Harbinger Theatre, Albany, NY

Into the Breeches by George Brant. Directed by Lauren D. Annibale.

Reviewed by J. Perter Bergman.

“Ladies! Walk!”

Considering his estimable history as a playwright and award winner, it feels odd to me that I had never heard of George Brant before this year when his opera, written with composer Jeannine Tesori for the Metropolitan Opera, “Grounded” - based on his play of the same name which had been directed by Julie Taymore starring Anne Hathaway, opened this Autumn. The author of at least a dozen plays, “Into the Breeches” had been performed at Trinity Playhouse in Providence, Rhode Island, which lent some of its history to the creation of the play. Those specific references have been altered by Albany’s Harbinger Theater to reflect historic Albany which makes this production more relevant to local audiences.



The women of “Into the Breeches”; Photo: David Quinones, Jr.

Featuring six women and two men this show brings to mind Shakespeare & Company’s recent production of “The Contention” a combination of elements in the three Henry IV plays by that author. Shakes & Co has always mixed genders and races in their acting company and in this play, set in 1942, a time when men were scarce during world war II, Brant has given his premier character, Maggie - wife of the theater’s artistic director - the opportunity to do just that. She has decided on an all female cast performing his version of the Henry plays. With the help of her stage manager, Stuart, she sets out to do what has not been done before and the comedy ensues when she casts the theater company’s star Celeste - a renowned local Juliet, as Prince Hal.



Monet Thompson Young, Josephine E. Tracey;
Photo: David Qyinales, Jr.

Cross-dressing is the concept; therefore the title of this funny play. Working with her cast, Maggie, nicely played by Josephine E. Tracey, has to create ways to train very womanly women to become manly men. This proves more delightful to watch than I would have believed as the cast parades their cod-pieces in a tight circle with the Board President's wife, Winnifred,, played by the delightful Jackie DiGiorgis, having almost too much fun at the exercise.

Crossing sexual identities is not the only social issue addressed in this play. Racial issues come into play when the wardrobe mistress assumes the role of Hotspur. Monet Thompson Young plays Ida and plays her brilliantly. Another "issue" addressed in this play is the stage manager's identity as a person. The only man left in the company he must face the truth about himself and express that truth in magnanimous and hilarious fashion. Patrick "Crue Steele" Fiaschetti plays the role with panache, joining the acting troupe while never ignoring or deserting his stage management duties. A truly hilarious conceit.

Losing her leading lady, Maggie is forced to alter concepts and ideals and pursue the best production possible. Her wooing of Celeste, played by Laura Darling, is very funny indeed. Celeste is given a highly egotistical performance, which is just right after all, by this actress.

The company does well with their characters and the physical production is as community theatre as possible which gives the show a basic reality that a more professional presentation would have done. Costumes by Barbara Neu Berti work well and sound designed by Joshua Horowitz keeps us in 1942 perfectly. Director Lauren D'Annibale has pulled off the show with a professional eye and a sure knowledge of how comedy works. Even the darkest moments of the play relate to the humor of the situation.



Josephine E. Tracey, Laura Darling;
Photo: David Quinones, Jr.

This unusual comedy produced by Harbinger Theatre plays at the Albany Barn through November 16, If you love theatre or comedy or history, try to see it.

+ 11/8/2024 +

Into the Breeches plays at the Albany Barn, 56 Second Street, Albany, NY through November 16.
For information and tickets go to Harbingertheatrealbany@gmail.org.