

Royal Battle Lines Are Drawn In The Rep's "The Lion In Winter"



Jeffrey King as Henry and Carol Schultz as Eleanor in the Rep production of "The Lion In Winter." ©Photo by Jerry Naunheim Jr.

12th Century England is starkly portrayed in the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis opener for 2016, James Goldman's masterpiece, "The Lion In Winter." Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine aren't

on the best of terms but this seems to be de regueur for their marriage. But now Eleanor is out from her banishment to another castle for Christmas. An exile that Henry has placed her in for years. Now that their three sons are vying to be successor to the crown, the opportunity for king and queen and the three princes to scheme, plot and be on their worst behavior is ripe.



Grayson DeJesus as Richard and Carol Schultz as Eleanor in “The Lion In Winter” at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. ©Photo by Jerry Naunheim Jr.

Goldman’s script is clever and, in the right actors’ hands (as it is here) at times can be hilarious. Sniping is the order of the day and the luscious delivery of Carol Schultz is perfect for the feisty Eleanor. Whether the line cuts like a knife or merely sarcastically and subtly pierce the armor, she delights in every turn of phrase. All the while she handles herself with the regal aplomb befitting the queen. Her desirable land in the Aquitaine is the reason for the long ago marriage in the first place and now she plans to give that land to the eldest, Richard. Henry feels the youngest, John, should be the next king and the middle son, Geoffrey, appears to be left in the lurch.



Jeffrey King as Henry and Angela Janas as Alais Capet in the Rep's production of "The Lion In Winter." ©Photo by Jerry Naunheim Jr.

Jeffrey King plays the king with the braggadocio that comes along with the territory. In spite of being outplayed time and again by Eleanor, he keeps his dignity and manages to meet her quip for quip throughout the play. And, in that long standing tradition of kings, Henry has a mistress—the current one being Alais Capet, daughter of the King of France. She is played with a great combination of innocence and allure by Angela Janas. She becomes a pawn that may prove more a detriment than an asset to Henry.



Carol Schultz as Eleanor consoles Angela Janas as Alais in the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis production of “The Lion In Winter.” ©Photo by Jerry Naunheim Jr.

The three sons are played with great diversity as they all have qualities that both help and hinder their drive for the throne. Grayson DeJesus is Richard, the steadiest of the three while Wilson Bridges languishes in the mediocrity that is the middle son. Finally, the foolish and perhaps a bit too immature John is given a strong portrayal by Kurt Hellerich. Rounding out the cast is Ryan Ward as Philip Capet, King of France. The cast is a strong one and offers a fascinating look at the squabbles that helped build England at this time in history.

The starkly cold yet effective set design of Joseph P. Tilford works beautifully in creating the mood of the period. Matthew J. LeFebvre’s costumes realistically portray the royals and the Thomas C. Hase lights continue the dark mood and hollowness that pervades the dank castle and its inhabitants.



A scene from “The Lion In Winter” at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. ©Photo by Jerry Naunheim Jr.

Director extraordinaire Edward Stern returns to put his special stamp on “The Lion In Winter.” It’s been a while since I’ve seen the play on stage or re-watched the excellent film, but the humor brimming over throughout is not something I remember. It works so perfectly and enhances the story of this bickering and somewhat dysfunctional family. The 1966 Goldman script is just as powerful and delightful as it was when first written. Don’t miss this wonderfully acted and directed classic, “The Lion In Winter,” as it plays on the Rep Mainstage through January 31st. Give them a call at 314-968-4925 for tickets or more information.