

Hype ...

Sarah Gignac
OP THEATRE CRITIC

King Lear

Studio 58 (At Langara College)
Until February 24th
Ticket info: (604) 323-5227

Studio 58 calls itself “one of the best professional theatre training programs in this country.” Unfortunately, its production of *King Lear* fails to live up to such an extravagant claim.

No one expects college theatre to be perfect, but there are a few simple, professional theatre conventions that any group can achieve. The first—count how many seats your theatre has, and ONLY SELL THAT MANY TICKETS. It sounds easy, but somehow ten minutes before the show started, roughly twenty patrons were roaming the aisles, searching for somewhere to rest their rumps. Luckily, this reviewer

snagged one of the last seats, but that still left a couple dozen audience members that were forced to sit on the floor. The pre-show music, unrhythmic drumming mixed with what sounds like wind chimes and someone banging a fork on tin cans, did more to induce a headache than create any sort of atmosphere. So when the show finally started, ten minutes late, it at least alleviated the cacophonous pre-show music.

All these production glitches could have been forgiven, if you could have at least lost yourself in some good Shakespeare. But the production is so inconsistent that you spend most of the play trying to figure out what director Jane Heyman was thinking. Nothing fit together. It was like every production element was created without any communication between departments, and then all thrown together on opening night. The set is a large wooden circle painted gray with a revolving centre, and weird poles along the back that stick out at odd angles. Whatever effect is trying to be created is lost

the moment the first actor enters. If anyone moves faster than a slow walk, the sound of his or her footsteps on the plywood drowns out the dialogue. In the first few minutes of the play, one of the poles fell over, creating a loud clatter and making Goneril (Robyn Wilson) laugh in the middle of her speech to Lear. The poles are so rickety, I’m surprised it didn’t happen again.

The costume department seems to have had an “everyman for himself” attitude. Most of the men are in black with shiny cloak/vests. Lear’s daughters wear cocktail dresses with long gloves and black knee-high boots. Later on they change into garments that resemble big, billowy satin pajamas. The fool sports a felt hat that could have come out of a *Cat In The Hat* book. Edgar is in khaki’s, his brother Edmund in some sort of military fatigues. At one point some guy comes on in beige cargo pants. Instead of the costumes signifying a particular setting or time period, it looked like the actors had been playing dress-up in the



wardrobe room.

Despite the absence of any sort of consistency throughout the play, there are a few performances that make it worth sitting through all three hours of *King Lear*. Anthony Holland, founder of Studio 58, takes some warming up, but once he gets into it he is a wonderful Lear. Program graduate Allan Morgan brings a warmth and gentleness to the stage with his Earl of Gloucester. Joe

Ritchie’s Kent comes close to stealing the show. Together with Holland and Debbie Love as the Fool, they create some of the most touching moments in Shakespeare.

With this kind of talent, the show really has potential to be great. But it falls short with the supporting cast and the confusing production elements. And contrary to what they believe, they are not the best Canada has to offer.