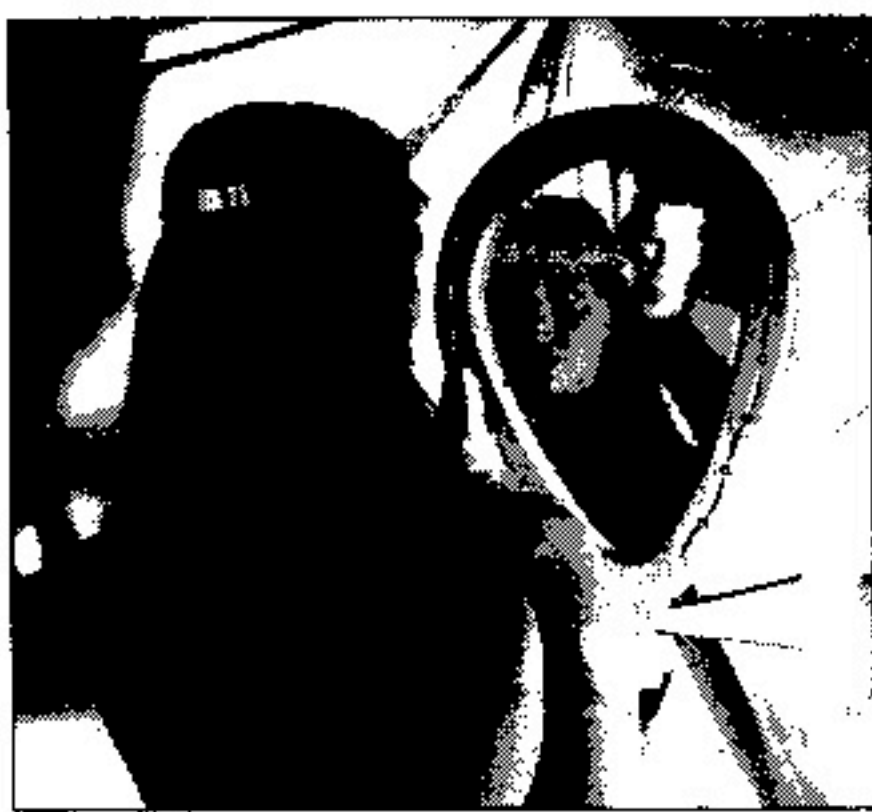


A Preview

"Antony and Cleopatra"

by Gerald C. Martin

The Rude Mechanicals will be serving up their production of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra" at the Greenbelt Arts Center after previous performances in Washington and Baltimore. The "Rudes" are known for their innova-



"Antony and Cleopatra" will be performed at the Greenbelt Arts Center from October 12 through 14.

tive adaptations of Shakespearean plays and this is no exception. In this version director Jaki Demarest has skillfully interwoven parts from John Dryden's play, "All for Love," with Shakespeare's lines. Some characters have been combined and the play has been shortened considerably. Being a black box performance there are no set changes to disrupt the flow. Costumes are generally simple; business suits for the Romans and leather and mail tunics for the Egyptians. The Egyptian ladies wear semi-exotic garb while Roman Octavia's dress is much more conservative. Though a Roman, Antony's costume shows that he has gone Egyptian.

Musical director Arthur Rowan has chosen some very appropriate pieces to set the mood. They are usually very effective except when they are too loud or too interesting. I missed a lot of lines listening to Vivaldi as the Romans and Egyptians danced while maneuvering for political positions.

It would be well worth while to read the plot summary in the program before the show as there are several battles and other complicated situations which could be confusing. Several years are supposed to have passed in the course of the play but the audience might not realize it. The scenes shift from Egypt to Rome and to places in between with little to clue you in. There are also unfamiliar words but generally the gist of what is going on is pretty clear.

This could be a difficult play to "get." The actors are playing actors rehearsing "Antony and Cleopatra."

We see the players coming onto the stage preparing to rehearse, warming up, putting on their costumes, talking to the audience. There is no attempt to fool you into believing that they are anything but actors. They are making you a part of the performance. Even when the house lights go off and the spotlight comes on and they have become Romans and Egyptians, they occasionally come back to our world to link us to the action.

Hunger seems to be a major theme in this play. Antony's hunger for Cleopatra is never satisfied for long.

Cleopatra's hungers for life, love and power are never satiated. Octavius' hunger for dominance drives him relentlessly, his sister Octavia's hunger for love or even kindness from Antony is never realized. No one in this play is

ever satisfied with their situation. By bringing the audience into the play, they are meant to be left with a feeling of dissatisfaction as well. It is intended to make us feel something akin to what these characters feel.

At the end of the play, with a large number of the characters dead, there is a sense that the play is still unfinished. It concludes with a chaotic scene with the players declaiming appropriate lines from other Shakespearean plays. There is no real ending, leaving the audience with a feeling of emptiness or hunger. In the director's notes Jaki Demarest concludes, "And if you come away with nothing more than the sense that it was maddening and intriguing in equal parts, not sure whether you loved it or hated it, you will have come as close to 'getting it' as anyone ever will."

Greenbelter Alan Duda plays Antony as a great man in decline. He has become addicted to the charms of Cleopatra; neglecting his wife, his children and his duties to satisfy his appetite as his world collapses around him.

Only when he is separated from Cleopatra does he show his true heroic character but his hunger for Cleopatra always draws him back.

And Amy Rauch as the bipolar Cleopatra was definitely an appetizing dish at the opening performance at the DC Arts Center. When she is in a good mood she can turn Antony into Jello. But she can also scratch the eyes out of a messenger who brings bad news. Morrigan Condo will play Cleopatra on October 13.

The entire cast is very strong. Paul Davis is exceptionally good at portraying the cynical Enobarbus.

Arthur Rowan is commanding and even frightening as Octavius. Greenbelter Bill Jones is superb as Agrippa, showing true Roman virtue by subsuming his own best interests for what he believes best for Rome. Katie Wanschura and Greenbelter Heather Martin are well cast as Charmian and Iras, Cleopatra's dutiful attendants.

Greenbelter Rachel Duda will play Charmian October 12. The acting is worth seeing.

Performances at 7:30 Thursday through Saturday October 12, 13, 14 and at 2 p.m. Saturday, October 14.



Alan Duda and Amy Rauch as Antony and Cleopatra.

PHOTOS BY RACHEL DUDA