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REVIEW



‘Camelot’

*in paradise irresistible
blend under TheatreZone play*

Harriet Howard Heithaus

Naples Daily News

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How to know your production of “Camelot” has nailed it:

- Your audience walks out of G&L Theatre singing snatches of the title song and the musical’s best known ballad, “If Ever I Would Leave You” aloud.
- Adam Ross Glickman’s Mordred is such a slimy snake of a villain he gets booed at the curtain call.
- As Queen Guenevere, Whitney Winfield sings and jumps rope at the same time during “The Lusty Month of May.”

A distilled transcription of the Lerner & Loewe musical that ate up the Tonys in 1961 is TheatreZone’s current production, and to say it works is an understatement. It’s been divested of a few minor characters and the crowd scenes at the tournament have been compressed into reactions in the royal box seats, which are priceless. So? It proves we don’t need live horses and a hundred extras to convey a tragedy that befalls three people who love each other and their countries.

“Camelot” has always been bridesmaid to “My Fair Lady” among Lerner & Loewe musicals. (For the record, “Gigi,” their other classic, was written for film, adapted into a musical.)

But it has the same emotionally warm melodies and clever, creative lyrics that warm an English major’s heart, and which this cast honors with clear, concise elocution. Those enchanted with its starmaker ballad, “If Ever I Would Leave You” will find the same emotional power in “Before I Gaze at You Again” and its more organic “I Loved You Once in Silence.”

This version is done as a medieval

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show in the local park. Its opening and surprisingly absorbing closing narrative details the progression of "Camelot" from middle age oral history to the pens of Lerner and Loewe. Costumes and props appear from trunks, and two bare tree branches at nether ends of the stage re-leaf to reflect the season. In keeping with the character emphasis, the castle of Camelot is reduced to a visual cue: a household banner-size mural hanging to one side of the stage.

It's minimalist, but effective under scenic designer Tlaloc Lopez-Wattermann, and choreographer Karen Molnar-Danni wisely confines dance to the appropriate moments. Keith Thompson, back after "Bright Star," has to be counting his blessings to have this orchestra, and the lighting of Adam Trummel puts our attention and emotions where they want us to be. Our favorite: the demonic glare of red footlights as the rebelling knights chorus "Fie on Goodness!"

That brings us to a shout-out for Glickman, phenomenally effective in two supporting roles. In the first act, he's Lance-

If you go: 'Camelot'

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays through March 20; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through March 20

Where: G&L Theatre, The Community School of Naples, 13275 Livingston Road, Naples

Tickets: \$50-\$85

To buy: theatre.zone or 888-966-3352, ext. 1

lot's Squire Dap, the slightly goofy servant of few words trailing his knight everywhere, pantomiming Lancelot's words in abject, comic loyalty. In the second act, he does a 180 from the pratfalls as the deadly Mordred, Arthur's love child from a long-ago affair. Mordred is out to subtly wreak chaos on everything dear to Arthur, and Glickman makes him thoroughly chilling.

Robert Koutras is the menschiest Arthur we've ever seen, yet logically so.

This is a guy who pulled Excaliber out of the stone because he was trying to save himself a trip home to fetch his own knight's blade. He oozes sincerity, with just a bit of panic gnawing at him under his royal robes. He writhes around the stage steps in agony at the prospect of meeting his bride, and even the young supporter who pledges fealty in the final scene momentarily sets Arthur on edge.

Whitney Winfield, on the other hand, creates an elegant Guenevere, with a

British penchant for attitude and a sweet, strong voice. She's conflicted over her feelings for the brash French knight at the Round Table and her support for her forever-philosophizing husband.

Gerritt Vandermeer wins us over from his opening "C'est Moi," hysterically funny — again, with a little help from Glickman. He plays Lancelot as the dual lineage of

Dudley Doright and Buzz Lightyear, with Maurice Chevalier's accent.

There are a few moments, largely in the first scene, during which the orchestra is hurrying the vocalist somewhat. And the accents occasionally lapse as the musical progresses. But that doesn't hurt the power of the performances.

This is one of Theatre-Zone's strongest musicals

in recent history. It shows again that Founding Artistic Director Mark Danni really knows how to handle quality material. The condensed version of that is: Go see it.

Harriet Howard Heithaus covers arts and entertainment for the Naples Daily News/naples-news.com. Reach her at 239-213-6091.



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