

# CRITICAL PRAISE FOR CYMBELINE

## 2014 Wilde Award Winner: Best of the Bard

(*Cymbeline*, Michigan Shakespeare Festival; Robert Kauzlaric, director)

**“Sometimes you walk out of a theater and you know you've experienced something special. Something you're not likely to ever experience again.**

On Sunday, I walked out of the Jackson Community College's Potter Center where the Michigan Shakespeare Festival was presenting *Cymbeline*, with the realization that **I may never again see this play done so well.**

For starters, *Cymbeline* isn't done very often. It has a convoluted plot and lacks some of the poetry of Shakespeare's other works. It is neither comedy nor tragedy, and is one of his longer plays.

**But director Robert Kauzlaric takes a strong hand to the script and molds it into a story that is compelling and fascinating. Then he works with a design team and a group of actors that couldn't be more committed to the group storytelling.**

The production values are high, and what Jeromy Hopgood does with scrims and cloths and Diane Fairchild does with lighting is nothing short of amazing. Add to that the original music and sound design by Kate Hopgood... and the audience is transported out of this world into one of another time, place and setting. [The play moves] from Rome to England to Wales without ever losing the audience or leaving them behind.

**It truly is teamwork amongst the production crew that makes things work. It isn't the costumes alone, the lighting alone, or the set pieces alone. All of them combine to tell the story, and it is their seamless integration as if done with one hand that makes the show magical...**



The play opens with one of those rousing Shakespearean pictures with a large ensemble of people on stage, all moving in perfectly coordinated steps around a spotlighted chest. From the chest come costumes and masks in a choreographed dance. Then Joe Lehman mounts the box as chorus, narrator and Pisanio, servant to Posthumus to give the “once upon a time”... Lehman gives Pisanio a sprightliness that draws the audience in. He makes clear his loyalties, and we see in Pisanio one of the few characters who are constantly loyal and honorable, never being gulled by what seems to be, when what seems to be contradicts what he knows to be true ...



Janet Haley is delicious as the evil stepmother and queen. She makes Disney's Maleficent seem cuddly and trustworthy... Rachel Hull's Imogen is powerful and intelligent. Hull gives the character a backbone that makes her one of Shakespeare's stronger women... Blixt creates an Iachimo that is casually evil. Unlike the Queen who is committed to her evil acts, Iachimo doesn't see himself as evil, merely as worldly. He does horrible harm for his own amusement, and does not think through what the consequences will be. It is this carelessness that sets up one of the more powerful moments at the end of the play, as Blixt leaves open the question of whether he is steeped in evil or whether it is possible for him to be redeemed...

Central to the play is the love story between Imogen and Posthumus. Hull and Edmund Alyn Jones could step right out of any fairy tale of a princess and a pauper. Their love for each other is deep, and the seeming betrayals leave them both devastated...

Blixt doubles as Iachimo and fight director in this production. **Together, Kauzlaric and Blixt create scenes of war that are elegant, exciting and fit in perfectly with the mood and theme of the production.**

While *Cymbeline* is often considered one of the Bard's lesser plays, **this production is a pure Shakespeare experience. From costumes, to speeches, to movement, to stage fighting, to flawed heroes, to irredeemably evil villains, it has everything you expect from a Shakespeare play – and you leave wondering why it isn't done more often.**

**The answer might be because it can rarely be done quite so well."**

-Bridgette M. Redman, *Encore Michigan*



“For the third and final offering of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Michigan Shakespeare Festival, **Director Robert Kauzlaric has taken Shakespeare’s complex tragicomedy Cymbeline and shaped it into a beautiful, exciting and highly theatrical fairy tale.**

With multiple story threads in this **thrilling roller coaster of a production**, things are seldom what they seem. It is important to pay attention to small incidents and early exposition that will become important later...

**Shakespeare’s world in Cymbeline is a scary, dangerous place but the play ends on a note of hope and forgiveness...**



Once again, this is an outstanding ensemble effort with many worthy performances... Congratulations to Kauzlaric for his addition to the Festival's select group of artistic associates and to the Michigan Shakespeare Festival on an outstanding 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Season.”

-Ann Holt, *MLive/Jackson Citizen-Patriot*



“**An excellent production** of William Shakespeare’s seldom-staged Cymbeline is on the schedule of this year's Michigan Shakespeare Festival in Jackson.

**It would be an easy joke to say that this is likely the best production of Cymbeline you have probably ever seen, because for most people it would be the only one they would have seen.** It is only the second production I have seen in nearly four decades of theater reviewing.

**But this is a great production by any standard. Director Robert Kauzlaric has made the complex plot amazingly easy to follow, both through his artful direction** of the fine cast and through the **judicious cuts** he has made to the script...

**This is arguably the most important production of this year's festival, both because of the rare chance to see this play and the excellence of the production.”**

-Robert Delaney, *Detroit New Monitor*





