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Cymbeline

by Winnie McCroy  
EDGE Editor  
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Hamish Linklater and Lily Rabe  
(Source:Carol Rosegg)

The Public Theater stages their second Shakespeare in the Park offering of the season, **"Cymbeline."** This elaborate, overly-complicated play once again brings the real-life couple of Lily Rabe and Hamish Linklater to the stage as star-crossed lovers.

Rabe plays Imogen, the British King Cymbeline's (Patrick Page) daughter. Against his will, she has wed her lowborn childhood playmate, Posthumus Leonatus (Linklater). The two are very much in love, but must separate when her father exiles him. They exchange tokens of love: he gives her a bracelet, and she gives him a ring.

Imogen's mother, played by the fiery-haired Kate Burton, wants her to wed her dunder-headed son (by another father) Cloten,

who is also played by Linklater, in a surfer-dude wig and Southern California drawl that evokes Jeff Spicoli from "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" as he mumbles lines like, "Her beauty and her brain go not together."

As the exiled Posthumus travels to Rome, he meets the irascible Iachimo (Raúl Esparza, oozing with smarm and charm), who bear-baits him into a wager that Imogen is not a virtuous woman. Iachimo arrives at Cymbeline's court, and when his attempts to seduce Imogen fail, he hides in a trunk entrusted to her for safekeeping. He makes note of her boudoir and her sleeping body, and absconds with her bracelet.

Rabe is stunning in this scene, as she lays abed, the wind blowing through her hair, looking for all the world like a young Greer Garson. It warrants noting here that her performance in this play is absolutely flawless. As with her portrayal of Beatrice in last season's "Much Ado About Nothing," Rabe is highly skilled at bringing to life the words of Shakespeare. One never has to struggle to understand what she is saying; in her mouth, Old English is born anew.

Meanwhile, back in Britain, Posthumus' servant Pisanio (a superb Steven Skybell) runs interference for his beloved master, seeing to the imprisoned Imogen's needs, and intercepting the Queen's poison, for which the wise doctor has substituted a non-lethal formula, correctly fearing the worse. The Queen intends to remove Imogen from the equation, saying, "She being down, I have placement of the British crown."

Under pressure from the Queen, King Cymbeline refuses the tribute of the Roman Lucius, there to collect tribute for Caesar. This provokes war between Rome and Britain.



Now, Clotus clumsily serenades Imogen in an attempt to woo; in general, I could have done without the musical interludes in this play. In some instances, they are dopey, as when Cloten sings, "Hark, hark, the lark."

In other, they are discordant, as when Iachimo and his flapper tootsie break into a dance more appropriate for a staging of "Guys & Dolls" than Shakespeare. It was a real WTF moment.

On the treachery tip, Iachimo has returned to Rome with "proof" of Imogen's unfaithful nature. Distraught, Posthumus orders Pisanio to murder Imogen, and sends her a letter telling her to meet him in Milford Haven in Wales. But Pisanio knows Imogen is true, and convinces her to dress up as a man (in a most charming case of crossdressing) and find her true love.

Lost in Wales, she runs into brothers Guiderius (David Furr) and Arviragus (Jacob Ming-Trent), a rustic pair who live with the elderly Belarius (Kate Burton), a banished lord from Cymbeline's court. What they don't know is that they're King Cymbeline's legitimate sons and heirs, stolen from their cribs some 20 years ago in an act of revenge.

Next comes the obligatory comedies of errors. Guiderius comes up against the braggart Cloten, who is disguised in Posthumus' clothes, and beheads him. They come home to their new "brother" Fidelio (Rabe), who has ingested the Queen's temporary poison, believe him dead, and bury both bodies side by side.

When Imogen comes to, she believes that Clotus' body is Posthumus, and throws herself on his grave. She awakes to find Lucius above her, to whom she swears her service and fidelity, having nothing more to live for.

Then, it's time for the battle scene. Guiderius and Arviragus fight side by side with the honorable Posthumus and drive the invaders away. By the ending all is, of course, resolved. The Queen's treachery is exposed, Iachimo admits he lied about Imogen's fidelity, Posthumus reveals himself and is reunited with Imogen as a protector of the throne, and the king is reunited with his sons, lost these 20 years.

The production is capped off with a dance number that, again, I could have done without. Although this play includes the proverbial "everything but the kitchen sink," it's still enjoyable to watch. On all counts, "Cymbeline" is a rousing success -- another in a delicious lineup of summer treats for lucky New Yorkers.

*"Cymbeline" runs through Aug. 23 at the Delacorte Theater, enter at W. 81st Street in Central Park. For information on how to obtain free tickets, visit [www.publictheater.org/en/Free-Shakespeare-in-the-Park/](http://www.publictheater.org/en/Free-Shakespeare-in-the-Park/)*

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>

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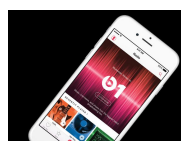
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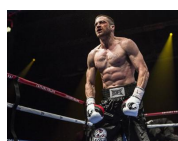
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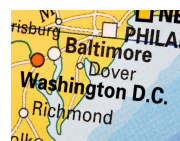
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