



Ari Mintz for The New York Times

“Cymbeline”: with Noah Brody and Ben Steinfeld (on floor) and, background, Jessie Austrian, left, and Emily Young, at the New Victory Theater.

By **BEN BRANTLEY**

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One of Shakespeare’s late romances, and one of his more fantastical offerings, “Cymbeline” presents a colorful but baffling jigsaw puzzle that has thwarted many an illustrious director.

A whirling, continent-spanning tale set in the age of the Roman Empire, “Cymbeline” is stuffed with elements that Shakespeare used more efficiently elsewhere: a cross-dressing heroine, a scheming and ambitious queen, confused identities, an Iago-like figure who goads a happily married man into irrational jealousy and a retreat from a worldly court into a sylvan wilderness. The play is probably best known for its use of a headless corpse and what may be the most beautiful funeral poem ever written (the one that begins “fear no more...”).

The Fiasco “Cymbeline,” like the British director [Declan Donnellan’s version of several years ago](#), starts from the premise that a complicated story is best told simply. There is next to no conceptual varnish on this production, which is directed by Noah Brody and Ben Steinfeld. The script has been altered to include an interpolated back-story prologue, and there is some judicious streamlining of scenes and characters. But basically this is “Cymbeline” without postmodern riffs and frills.

The stage at the New Victory is correspondingly naked. The set (designed by Jean-Guy Lecat, lighted by Tim Cryan) is made up of two crates, a sheet and what is accurately described in the program as a “fabulous trunk” (designed by Jacques Roy), which figures significantly in the headless corpse scene. The costumes (by Whitney Locher) are a comfortable medley of breeches, shirts and dresses that suggest a fairy-tale timelessness.

The acting is similarly free of elaborate interpretive flourishes. Four of the cast members Emily Young and Mr. Steinfeld (both seen on Broadway in “Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson”) and Paul L. Coffey and Andy Grotelueschen take on at least two major roles. Jessie Austrian and Mr. Brody devote themselves principally to the central lovers, the embattled princess Imogen (Ms. Austrian) and the noble but overly impressionable Posthumus (Mr. Brody), whose romantic problems manage to combine those of Romeo and Juliet *and* Othello and Desdemona.

Though everyone speaks the speech with clarity and feeling, no one is serving up complex psychological portraiture. Nor is anyone doing the sort of cartoonish goofing on their characters that has become all too common to Shakespeare these days. At first I worried that the actors’ forthright delivery might pall, but I was wrong. The lucid, modest performances here let the comedy, poignancy and unlikely magic of “Cymbeline” surface gently and naturally, unencumbered by conceptual baggage.

Despite the doubling, tripling and quadrupling of roles, I have never seen a “Cymbeline” as easy to follow as this one. The music (overseen by Mr. Steinfeld and performed by the cast), which ranges from Renaissance madrigals to hillbilly ballads, unobtrusively signals changes of tone and scene.

And while the few props and sticks of furniture are put to wonderfully multifarious use (that multi-paneled trunk really is pretty fabulous), there’s none of the aren’t-we-clever, self-congratulatory spirit that often accompanies such acts of theatrical legerdemain. For once, the play itself really is the thing, and nothing is allowed to block its view, even actorly vanity.

Since I left with equally fond feelings toward all the fresh-faced cast members, I’m singling out only one performance, that of the sheet. It is white, unembroidered and, I would guess, queen-sized. Before the show ends, it has effortlessly become a billowing sea, a virginal bedspread, a mournful shroud and a Roman toga, among other things. Like the trunk, it deserves its own curtain call.