



PROVIDED PHOTO

At center, Florizell (Benjamin Villa) and Perdita (Robynn Stanley) kiss while others dance at the sheep-shearing festival in Castleton State College's production of "The Winter's Tale."

THEATER REVIEW

Castleton delivers stylish 'Winter's Tale'

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CASTLETON — "The Winter's Tale" is one of William Shakespeare's lesser known plays, and one of his most interesting.

Castleton State College opened a stylish and well-acted student production Wednesday at Castleton Fine Arts Center that goes a long way in explaining the play's fascination.

What makes "The Winter's Tale" so unusual, perhaps unique, in Shakespeare is that it's a tragedy that morphs into a com-

edy — which is reflected so beautifully by Castleton sculptor and professor emeritus Bill Ramage's gloriously operatic set. It, too, morphs, and very effectively.

The tale begins in Sicilia, where the king, Leontes, is entertaining Pilothenes, king of Bohemia. But Leontes is the unhappy sort and decides that his wife Hermione's pregnancy was caused by Pilothenes.

She denies it vehemently, but Leontes' paranoia has

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overcome him. He orders Hermione imprisoned, where she is said to have died, and Pilothenes killed, but he escapes. The newborn baby girl, he orders, left to the elements.

Later, Leontes is told by the oracle that he's entirely in the wrong — but it's too late. Pretty dark?

Now, here's where the comedy begins. The abandoned baby girl, named Perdita, is discovered by a shepherd who raises her as her own. The fun happens 16 years later when Perdita and Florizell, the Bohemian king's son, fall in love without knowing the true identity of each other — or in Perdita's case, her own.

What follows is wonderful Shakespeare hijinks.

Interestingly, the finale presages the powerful finale of Mozart's "Don Giovanni," where Don Giovanni is unexpectedly challenged by the dead Commendatore.

The production by the Castleton theater department was a joy to see and quite entertaining. Directed by alumna Lauren Martin '06, now plying her trade in the New York theater world, it was well-conceived around the emotions involved rather than by a time period.

On stage, it was the women who truly excelled. Perhaps the finest performance was by Robynn Stanley, a senior from Middlebury, who gave Perdita real dimension. Much the same could be said for Sarah Connor, an East Montpelier junior, who created a most

sympathetic Hermione.

Despite an unwavering intensity, Boston senior Julianne O'Connor delivered a powerful performance as the all-important lady-in-waiting Paulina.

Although the two leading men were both a bit inflexible in their delivery, they were well-cast. Austyn Bevins, a junior from Colchester, managed well Leontes' transition from blindly arrogant king to broken man, while Jeff Blanchette, a freshman from Portsmouth, R.I., showed the initial charisma that turned Leontes against him.

Most fun was the commedia dell'arte team, a staple of Shakespeare's comedies. Christopher Belanger, a freshman from Lewiston, Maine, delivered a hilarious performance as the sly rogue Autolycus. His straight man,

Perdita's stepfather shepherd, is given a sympathetic performance by Tyrone Davenport, a Woodbury freshman, while the shepherd's son, the perpetual victim, is played charmingly by Andrew Donovan, a senior for Wilmington, Mass.

The production's weaknesses all had to do with speech, not uncommon with young actors. Yelling, much too common here, loses dramatic effectiveness after the first outburst, and is sometimes unintelligible. Diction, too, was sometimes an issue as some rapid-fire speech was lost in this large theater.

Still, the production was lots of fun as well as touching.

And it looked great. The aforementioned set was not only effective dramatically, it was a work of art that

would be at home in grand opera (so appropriate for Shakespeare). Angela Brande's broad approach to the costume design, as well as Middlebury senior Louis Riquelme's dramatic lighting both added to the fantasy-like quality of the production.

And, then, there was the bear ...

■ CASTLETON FINE ARTS CENTER

Castleton State College Theatre Arts Department presents a student production of William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale" Nov. 9-13 at the Castleton Fine Arts Center in Castleton. Performances are Wednesday-Saturday at 8 p.m., and Sunday at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$12; call (802) 468-1119, or go online to www.csc.edu/soundings.