

to launch its 13th season, North Carolina Stage Company has brought back a stellar director and assembled an extraordinary cast for Shakespeare's "Pericles, Prince of Tyre." It's simply theater of the highest order. Not conventional, nor easy to grasp, but an experience to remember.

"Pericles, Prince of Tyre" is underrated and seldom produced, though in the hands of an imaginative crew of theatrical craftsmen it can be a spectacular experience of cutting-edge theater. It's not just that director Ron Bashford knows how to take a lengthy and dicey work and turn it into a cohesive and comprehensible masterpiece, but with five really able actors honing their skills into a tight ensemble in the best sense, the result is a new work that is both entertaining and understandable, each without diminishing the other.

As with most of the Bard's work, unless you know the plot ("Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," "MacBeth," most likely) it is wise to pull up a synopsis of the story and get an overview before the show. This remarkably creative crew has adapted and abridged, combined characters and eliminated some to the degree that there has never been such a "Pericles."

Bashford and company have smoothed the edges, simplified the structure and made it



WILLIAM SANDERS/SANDERS@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM
Rebecca Morris and Willie Repoley are two of the cast members of NC Stage Co.'s production of Shakespeare's "Pericles, Prince of Tyre."

precise unison narrative.

Another noteworthy ensemble effort is the choreographed movement in scene after scene with tight precision and perfectly planned and meaningful moves. The rapid exits and entrances dazzle the mind.

Swann's athleticism is well noted, aided by fine

footwear. The stop-action and slowed down scenes are masterful. Clever lighting and other visual effects are splendidly executed. The story bounces all over creation, but the ensemble cast keeps it cohesive.

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IF YOU GO

What: "Pericles, Prince of Tyre."

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, through Sept. 14.

Where: North Carolina Stage Company, 15 Stage Lane, across from Zambra's, off Walnut Street.

Tickets: \$14-\$35. Visit www.ncstage.org or call 239-0263.

come out with high drama and no small number of laughs. The mockery of Morris dancing, the stylized shipwreck, the perfect pronunciation and projection of the iambic tetrameter and pentameter rhyme is all sheer genius.

W. Erik McDaniel has done it again, with striking lighting when called for, and unnoticed (the best kind) lighting throughout. The effec-

tive ambient and atmospheric sound is the work of Bashford and two of the five actors in this epic — Willie Repoley and Charlie Flynn-McIver.

These technical elements are more important on such a maxed-out stark, thus larger-looking stage, all Bashford's creation with help from Julie Ross. Costumes are marvelously understated as created by Jessica Tandy Kammerud, who is also stage manager and does prop design.

Those costumes are mostly monochromatic and consist of basic trousers on all five, save for the rare dress on women in the second half. Baggy shirts or blouses are then augmented and adjusted with the help of vests, waistcoats, baseball, military, fedora and other period hats, a white

dinner jacket, a short kimono, a black silk robe, scarves, shawls, capes, do-rags, tie-dyes and other imaginative accessories. No particular time is suggested in these ageless rags, and they serve the purpose well.

The consummate cast, in addition to McIver and Repoley, includes Lauren Fortuna, Rebecca Morris and Catori Swann. Between them they create 30 characters, but without the frenzy of costume changes demanded by "Greater Tuna" tribe or "Irma Vep."

The three males each play the title role: Swann as a young Prince, Repoley as the mid-aged Pericles and McIver as the aging Pericles. All five work in tandem exceptionally skillfully. They effect a Greek Chorus as the narrator in perfectly