



## A WINTER'S TALE - Theatre ☆☆☆☆

SHOWING FROM - TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2015 THROUGH TILL  
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2015

OLDHAM COLISEUM - OLDHAM

*Gill Whalley* | Tuesday, September 29, 2015



Tuneful tales: Andy Cryer and Jack Lord in 'A Winter's Tale' at the Oldham Coliseum (Photo by Noddy Clark)

**'EXIT PURSUED BY BEAR' IS PROBABLY ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS STAGE DIRECTIONS FROM SHAKESPEARE'S 'A WINTER'S TALE', RAISING CHALLENGES FOR DIRECTORS AND QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCES ACROSS THE CENTURIES, ALL KEEN TO SEE HOW THIS INSTRUCTION WILL BE INTERPRETED.**

The play, being performed at Oldham Coliseum until 3rd October, has a reputation for raising challenges in other ways. Both comic and tragic, it leaps in time and setting, containing moments of madness, sadness and loss as well as hilarity, magic and music. *Northern Broadsides excel in their ability to tell stories in original and accessible ways*. Lots for the excellent Northern Broadsides theatre company to get their teeth into and their performance of this play, currently touring across the country until November 28th, does not disappoint on any front.

The initial setting of the play directed by Conrad Nelson, in his dual role as both Director and Leontes, is moved to 1999 on the eve of the millennium where King Leontes of Sicilia has everything a man could want; a beautiful pregnant wife, a son and heir and close friends enjoying the celebrations. As the bells of hope ring out for the future the mood changes however and gripped by an irrational obsessive jealousy he falsely accuses his queen, Hermione (Hannah Barrie) of having slept with his brother Polixenes (Jack Lord).

### **STOICISM AND DIGNITY**

The first half is dominated by Conrad Nelson's outstanding performance, communicating the increasingly dark introspection that grips Leontes with a powerful intensity. Increasingly losing touch with everyone around him he orders the death of both his wife and new baby and is left to face the consequences as loss builds on loss and his world falls apart. Equally strong is Hannah Barrie's Hermione, who conveys her stoicism and dignity while Polixenes captures the indignance of a man wrongly accused and afraid for his life. The design for these first acts is a beautifully simple set by Dawn Allsop, reflecting this sombre mood, stripped back, grey, and bare.

The second half enters a very different world of colour and moving forward 16 years we focus on the royal couple's daughter Perdita who, against the odds survived, brought up by a Shepherd in the countryside of



Bohemia.

Cue

music, colour and dance and much hilarity as the focus changes to comic characters, mistaken identity and a jolly sheep-shearing festival. The second half is initially dominated by a wonderful comic performance from Mike Hugo's con-man Autolycus who adopts an impressive range of regional accents and guises. He performs as a one man band before being joined in toe tapping folk dance numbers by the rest of the cast which had the audience clapping along. A Bob Dylan blues number follows, alongside a hilariously entertaining x factor style sing off amongst the group, underlining the versatility and strengths of this multi-talented cast.

### **EMOTIONAL JOURNEY**

The mood changes again for the third act's scene of reconciliation and forgiveness as the statue of Hermione comes to life to a beautifully sung choral piece which sets the tone for the note of redemption and hope on which the play ends. Northern Broadsides excel in their ability to tell stories in original and accessible ways and strong performances, music, dance and comedy combine in this production to take the audience on the emotional journey required by the play. And the question about the bear? Simply and cleverly resolved in the understated way that's typical of this entertaining production.

Well worth seeing for yourself as the production continues to play at Oldham Coliseum until October 3rd before touring round the country.