

The Winter's Tale review at Harrogate Theatre – 'mastery and magic realism'



The Winter's Tale at Harrogate Theatre. Photo: Nobby Clark

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by [Rich Jevons](#) - Sep 25, 2015

Northern Broadsides' *The Winter's Tale* is a typically northern take for this company on the Shakespearean text. It traverses some 16 years using the dramatic device of Time, the Chorus. In an outstanding performance as Leontes, King of Sicilia, Conrad Nelson expertly depicts his self-destruction through an entirely unfounded jealousy. Nelson manages to bring out the initial insidious tyranny and insanity of his character, then turn his part to play for redemption and reconciliation.

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Equally adept acting is seen in Hannah Barrie's Hermione, his long-suffering wife, who maintains her stoicism throughout, refusing to blame her master for his misguided emotion and enduring her undignified treatment to the end. But she is not the only one hit by Leontes' lunacy, and Jack Lord as Polixenes captures the indignance of a man wrongly accused and afraid for his life.

The first half of the show is fairly bleak and barren of humour, a fact made up for by the splendidly ribald comedy of the second act. There is an altogether different world in terms of Dawn Allsop's design, after the shades of greys for the palatial and prison walls, we find a frenzy of vibrant colour for the countryside scenes. When the ensemble breaks out into song and dance, in which Vanessa Schofield as Perdita shines brightly, it is, after all that angst, a release. There is light relief also to be gained from Mike Hugo as Autolycus, a con man with a heart of gold whose tricks develop the action apace.

Verdict

Conrad Nelson's powerful performance as Leontes is matched in the mastery and magic realism of his direction and benefits from exacting ensemble support



