



The Tempest a hit with regional twist

The Doha Players staged the Shakespearean classic to much applause. **By Anand Holla**

Staging a Shakespearean classic like *The Tempest* is no mean feat. In four shows earlier this week, Qatar's long-standing community theatre group The Doha Players pulled off an engaging production of the play at Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC).

In March, The Doha Players' production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* drew considerable acclaim. And now, the group along with Park House Community Initiative, has given the city a breezy, musical-tinged take on *The Tempest*; the audience approval attested by the full house on the opening day and a generally responsive rapport throughout and at the end of the shows.

The Tempest is set on a remote, mysterious island in the Maghreb of Northwest Africa and The Doha Players has capitalised on this setting that's clearly related to the region we are in. So the cast was seen wearing slippers bought from Morocco and the costumes, especially the turban styles, were distinctly Moroccan. This clever decision, to start with, roots the play in a more relatable and vivid atmosphere.

The tale opens on board a ship that is being battered by a storm – or the Tempest – while its crew toils away to stop the ship from sinking. The play then follows the story of Prospero, the double-crossed Duke of Milan, who will stop at nothing to seek revenge against his enemies and restore his daughter Miranda to royal honour.

Usually, *The Tempest* gets majorly revamped. This version, however,



SPECTACLE ON STAGE: Ferdinand (Sebastian Delascasas), left, and Miranda (Katie McIlroy) in *The Tempest*.

Photo by Paul Cooper

stayed mostly true to the text. For those straining their ears, and mind, to make sense of the archaic English, respite came in the commendable performances of the cast; the actors' emotions conveying enough to steer the audience past the complex bits.

Directed by renowned director and former Broadway writer James Mirrione with Shakespeare expert and author Kim C Sturgess, *The Tempest's* cast rehearsed for around three months, and it showed. Be it the spurned Prospero (played by

Mione van der Merwe) aided well by his spirit servant Ariel (played by Dawn Fawcett and Olivia Babski), or Ferdinand (Sebastian Delascasas) and Miranda (Katie McIlroy) who made for a fine on-stage match, or comic reliefs Stephano (Tim Irish) and Trinculo (Gary Mond); the acting of the entire cast was top-class.

There were a bunch of highlights in the play, not the least of which was a fabulous dance piece by Babski. Even the theatrics, especially those by the chest-beating Caliban,

worked well for the lightness with which they were delivered. Apart from the dances, all the music – appropriately atmospheric – was written specifically for the play, and in the end, all elements seemed to complement one another.

Soon after one of the shows, Dawn Fawcett, who, along with Olivia Babski, plays Ariel in the play, said, "I think the wonderful thing about Doha Players as a group is that it's a very close community. People are genuine friends as well. It's a unique

group because it's a community theatre group and yet it's at a kind of semi-professional level. We are not paid but we've got such a high standard of people involved – wonderful musicians, behind-the-scenes talents who do the costumes and make-up."

Fawcett said that they wanted to give the audience "a sense of the wonder of Shakespeare, a sense of the beauty of the spectacle," and just wanted everyone to have a good time. "That's the key," she said.

Last week, before the play hit the stage, Sturgess said that they will highlight only what's in the text. Sturgess had said, "We have worked hard to make our production relevant to the world we are in, and the play will say everything that Shakespeare expected his audience to understand. The play will just communicate the text. The audience will get *The Tempest!*" That seems to have come true.

Believed to have been written in 1611, *The Tempest* is said to be the last play completed by Shakespeare before he retired from active connection with theatre to spend the remainder of his life in leisure in his native town of Stratford-on-Avon.

While there were quite a few high points in the play, what's been the moment of high for Fawcett and her friends? "For us as a whole, it's the very last bit where we come together as a cast on the stage, right before we do our bows. At that point, we have lost any stress we had, and we are happy, while hoping that the audience is happy. It's lovely," she said.



The cast takes a bow at the play finale.

Photo by Howard Wilks