

Theatre Review: The Winter's Tale (Live Screening)

As part of the Royal Opera House's live screenings, [Jessica Jenkinson](#) checked out this adaptation of one of Shakespeare's lesser works

Friday 23 March 2018



The Winter's Tale.

The genre of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* has been timelessly debated. Choreographer Christopher Wheeldon's telling of the tale takes the audience from a realm of intense psychological drama, to one of ease and tenderness by the second act. Whilst these two very distinct acts brought staging, costume and choreography of a complete aesthetic contrast, a contrast pivotal in depicting the two very different kingdoms of Bohemia and Sicilia, its execution led to a decline in narrative captivation. Although I personally favour dark and emotional intensity within a performed narrative, the heightened tensions, malice and seething insanity of the first act was performed with such artistry, it overpowered the following act, underwhelming its agility.

"The language collapses under the weight of emotion," is how former Royal Opera House ballerina Darcey Bussell described the performance of this classic drama as a ballet. The absence of spoken word was compensated by an intensity of movement and atmosphere on the stage. The prologue was symbolic in its presentation of Leontes and Polixenes: the two young kings are formulaically aligned on stage with their two Mothers, two crowns and growth into two men. Whilst seemingly unified, their starkly contrasting costumes of red and green symbolically informed their differences from the start. Polixenes' bright red foreshadows his deliverance of danger and disorder later in the performance, whilst Leontes' green develops into a colour that associates with his forthcoming descent into insanity.

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The simplistic innocence of childhood depicted in the prologue passes as act one opens into the austere kingdom of Leontes. The stage's furnishing of large white arches and courtiers in formal costume of midnight blues, dark greens and blacks presents a realm of coldness with opulence. Polixenes' costumes of red and gold are jarring in the palace, as is his attention to the King's beautiful wife Hermione (performed by Lauren Cuthbertson,) the intimacy of their Pas de Deux steal the focus of many group dances. The very moment Leontes is suspicious of the pregnant Hermione is during a dance she performs with both Kings- suddenly the merriment is struck by a strobe of green light and silence, as both men place their hands on her bump. The green and red sleeves meet on her purple dress, this fusion of the three characters provokes the psychological disturbance onto this scene of pleasantry.

The most eerie scene of act one was shortly after Leontes' suspects Hermione, whilst she and Polixenes glide across four marble Grecian statues on the stage. Leontes spies painfully as each statue spins to face the audience- the statues scenes of stagnant dramatism, the green light and the progressive self-exasperation of Leontes- projected through his ridged choreography and poignant expressions, truly portrayed a man consumed by rage. Through costume and choreography, Leontes' internal boiling seemed to deform Hermione. Her purple frock is replaced by a frail ivory gown and her choreography becomes troubled through repetition and sharpness. Her newly born child, Perdita, is brought before Leontes in a scene of despair- rejection followed by rage, the audience is ultimately chilled by the destruction, death and dismay.



The sudden sense of acceptance, resolution and completion was a drastic anti-climax from the anxiety and fervour of the first act.



After twenty minutes of silent recovery in the interval, the opening of act two almost seemed like a scene appropriate for *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* or *Twelfth Night*. Enchanting, the ginormous spindly tree of the scenery and the flute player made the scene folk-like. The gold pieces flourishing on the tree reminded the audience of the princesses' regal birth, a subtle foreshadowing of direction her story is to go. The warm orange hues and steaminess of the forested realm in the scenery seemed distance from the cold austerity of the Kingdom. Whilst, Perdita (performed by Sarah Lamb,) danced angelically in this warm and colourful realm- the scene seemed rather pictorial, the grasping narrative of the first act had diminished. The final scene where Perdita and the Prince of Bohemia, Florizel, (performed by Vadim Muntagirov,) arrive at the Kingdom of Leontes is a scene that was entirely understated. The rosy unification of Hermione's ghost, Leontes and Perdita seemed unjust to Hermione's fate. The sudden sense of acceptance, resolution and completion was a drastic anti-climax from the anxiety and fervour of the first act.

Whist Wheeldon is true to Shakespeare's shift in the story, and infuses the performance with visual and aesthetic allure, the overall decline in narrative made *The Winter's Tale* a ballet of disappointed potential.

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