

The Rite of Succession

Nearly Naked Theatre's *The King of Infinite Space* at Phoenix Theatre's Little Theatre (For a map to location, click [this link](#))

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Nearly Naked Theatre's Artistic Director **Damon Dering** says in his Director's notes that he has been dreaming of directing **Andrew Ordover's** darkly ritualistic *The King of Infinite Space* for 11 years. The script is an actor's dream, full of the kind of subtext, depth, and emoting that performers love to tackle. It's also the type few companies will consider, as its near future, post-apocalyptic, play-within-a-play, politically oppressive script is not exactly a rip-roaring crowd pleaser. Of course, this kind of play is my choice of an evening's entertainment, and I'm glad that Dering has been daring enough to mount the production, despite all of the above challenges, and a cast of 19 that needs to be consistently in harmony.

Set in a former prison after a war has laid waste to the world, *The King* keeps his subjects in line with an iron fist. In the aftermath of a failed coup lead by Abel Zander, an idealistic youth, the members of the insurgency are made to perform a history play written by *The King's* second, Shakespeare, that features an earlier idealistic outsider who attempted a prior revolution. The ritualistic play, featuring a Chorus and leader, rhythmic passages, and even alternate scenes, reveals the folly of idealism, and the inescapable truth about the nature of power. By the end, the play has become life, and Abel must try to find a way to avoid repeating history and save his people.

Dering has done a great job of bringing the ensemble to a level of trust that allows them to work as a unit. Their chanted sections and struggles are hauntingly performed. Dering has tapped different styles of theatre to borrow from for his internal play, and they blend together very well. There are some standout performances, but the few weaker ones do nothing to hinder the progression of the play or the cohesion of the ensemble.

The two lead warriors, **Wes Martin** as *The King* and **Michael Sherwin** as Abel, are excellent in their presentations. Martin is able to mix oppressive, violent, and weary to create a hateful, yet slightly sympathetic character. Sherwin is full of youthful angst, and is very realistic in the midst of this sci-fi setting. He never wavers from portraying the character's stubborn commitment to ideals. As the young woman revolutionary and love interest of outsider Thomas, **Andrèa Morales** is on fire, investing a lot into her driven character. **Slade Hall** is effective in the role of Thomas, while **Cisco**

Saavedra does a very good job in his dual roles of Abel's brother Kenneth, and Henry the King in the internal play.

Among the members of the ensemble, Dering is subdued in his role of the older Shakespeare, while **Bill Lowry** is very good as Dering's younger version and other roles. Surprising is **Alicia Marie Sanderson** as the caged witch, The Shekina; she shows she is willing to do anything to perform the wild role, and her pluck is admirable.

Kim Parmon's choreography is very impressive, as is **Terre Steed's** musical direction. **Tim Butterfield** and **Tifani Pust's** scenic design is very impressive for the limitations of the Phoenix Theatre Little Theatre space. The same can be said for **Jeremy Gray's** lighting and **Marc Pacheco's** sound design. **Ava Dering's** costumes work well, and help in defining character.

Not everything clicks in Dering's production. The pacing sometimes becomes quirky, and not all of the performances are up to the leads. When considering the difficulty of the script in direct contrast to the size and resources of the company, this is a successful, if depressing, evening of theatre.

Production Details:

The King of Infinite Space by **Andrew Ordover**

Nearly Naked Theatre

Phoenix Theatre's Little Theatre, Phoenix (For a map to location, click [this link](#))

(602) 274-2432

March 15th - April 7th, 2002

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