

The Lion In Winter

I am very glad we were able to arrange our obscenely busy schedule in such a way to be able to see the play The Lion In Winter on Saturday night. A great friend and fellow blogger, [Jamiahsh](#) was a ~~sucker~~ kind enough to babysit all four kids for us, as this was not a play for children. Not that it was “adult” per se, but our younger two especially would NOT have been able to sit still throughout the entire production.

The Lion in Winter tells the story of King Henry II and his family in 1183. Although the actual play is fictional, it is based upon real people and real events. King Henry has 3 surviving sons who share the same goal: to inherit the kingdom, although that is where their similarities end. Richard, the eldest brother, “growls out for gore”, as it is said in the play. He is the warrior of the bunch, and he has the temper to match. Geoffrey (played a little too convincingly, haha, by a great friend and fellow blogger, [justj](#) – great job!) is the scheming, conniving, if mostly forgotten middle brother. Geoffrey “hums treachery” and is the epitomy of someone who suffers from middle child syndrome – and it’s that much more hilarious when his parents actually admit to not giving him the time of day! John is the youngest brother, who is favored by his father for some reason despite his lack of... well, his lack of much of *anything* upstairs (I’m tapping my head). Eleanor, Henry’s estranged and imprisoned wife, is a tyrant in her own right, although she is largely limited by gender roles in the twelfth century.

This particular production was co-directed by a good friend – someone whose many talents I’ve long admired – she’s a gem! She is a very detail-oriented, hard worker, and the finished production illustrated those attributes. Because The Lion In Winter is typically an historical drama, it wouldn’t normally be one of my favorite shows – I’m the type to much prefer good stagings of upbeat musicals like Joseph and the Amazing

Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Wizard of Oz or slapstick comedies like Idol Night at the Karaoke Place, The Nerd, or even a good melodrama. That being said, I can honestly say (and to my surprise) that I was never once bored during *The Lion in Winter*. And even being an historical drama, it's not without its (large) share of comedy as well. The dialogue (and hilarious insults!) fly swiftly and smartly, and I honestly wish time would have allowed me another opportunity to see the play as I think there were many more things I could have caught, especially if I weren't a walking zombie these days. The play is complex; its dialogue and characters almost too intricate to effectively absorb in just one sitting. The playwright, James Goldman, found many opportunities within the script to have the characters make clever satirical remarks, often making fun of the time period in which the play takes place. Among my favorites was the following exchange between John and his mother Eleanor, the Queen:

Towards the end of the first act of *Lion in Winter*, John is astonished and horrified when his older brother Richard pulls a knife on him. "A knife," he says, "he's got a knife." To which his mother, Eleanor, responds by saying: "Of course he has a knife. He always has a knife. We all have knives. It is eleven eighty-three and we're barbarians!" Just the memory of that line makes me smile, especially because the woman who played Eleanor was simply awesome – she gave one of the best performances I've ever seen on a community theater's stage. I would expect it to be difficult to give life to a character as complex as Eleanor; after all, in Henry's words, Eleanor "thinks heavy thoughts like molten lead and marble slabs." but she did it marvelously.

Actually, all of the acting was great in this production; King Henry came across as powerful yet emotionally weary and even a bit vulnerable, and King Philip of France seemed to be both a willing yet also an unwitting pawn in the treacherous game played by the royal family of England around 1183.

Also of note in this particular staging of the show was the remarkable set which exemplified an old European castle quite well. Although it amounted to hard physical labor for its extensive stage crew, the medieval set was easily (depends who you ask, I guess!) transformed into 6 distinct settings for the play.

Overall, a good show, and a fine job by both cast and crew. I only wish I had a chance to review it earlier so I could have done my part in recommending it to and recruiting audience members. Well, such is a busy life with 4 little kids, I suppose!