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 **Fixing King John by No Name Players (review)**

M. G. Aune

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Fixing King John Presented by No Name Players at the Off the Wall Theater, Carnegie, Pennsylvania. July 18–August 2, 2014. Written by Kirk Lynn. Directed

by Steven Wilson. Costume Design by Beth Steinberg. Lighting Design by Eve Bandi. Scenic Design by Don DiGiulio. With Todd Betker (Pembroke), Tressa Glover (Constance), Matt Henderson (Arthur), Gregory Lehane (King Philip), Jason Spider Matthews (The Bastard), Mike Mihm (King John), Hayley Nielsen (Blanch), Jody O'Donnell (Dauphin), Cary Anne Spear (Queen Elinor), and Ricardo Vila-Roger (The Bishop).

In their production of *Fixing King John*, the No Name Players provided their audience with a sense of the process as well as the product of adapting Shakespeare's *King John*. The program notes by Kirk Lynn, of the Austin, Texas-based acting company Rude Mechanicals, describe how actors, directors, and costume designers all work with Shakespeare's plays, but as a playwright he is barred from participating--the play is already written. So he began to "translate" *King John* into modern English, rewriting five or six lines every day. The process included adding enough expletives to make David Mamet proud, for Lynn claims that "Shakespeare was nothing if not committed to cursing and smut." He also revised and cut the plot and reduced the cast to ten characters. His version was given its premiere by the Rude Mechanicals in November 2013.

A former student of Lynn's, director Steven Wilson felt the play fit well with the No Name Players' ethos: presenting collaborative productions of new and thoughtful plays for the greater Pittsburgh community. To this end, he revised the play slightly, shifting the setting to a building site and costuming the characters as construction workers wielding hammers rather than swords (altering the lines where necessary). The unfinished construction site set, built of unpainted plywood and two-by-fours, gave the cast three levels to work with. Tools, paint, lumber, and other worksite debris littered the area. The stage right wall was covered with maps, and the word "France" was spray painted across it. A stage left doorway on the highest platform had "England" scrawled on its lintel.

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The English characters were costumed in work clothes: blue jeans, tool belts, flannel shirts, and work boots. King John stood out, wearing a metallic gold colored hardhat with the top cut away to resemble a crown.

The French characters and Constance wore suits and ties. All characters were filthy, with stained, dusty clothes and smears of dirt on their faces and hands. The Dauphin's crown was a white hardhat and King Philip's was a toy made of plastic (Fig.1).

Pembroke stood in for all the English nobles. Robert Falconbridge was combined with Pandulph to create a new character, the Bishop. The Bastard was given Hubert's lines, the Dauphin given Chatillon's, and Blanch given the Citizen's and Peter of Pomfret's. All other secondary characters were eliminated. The changes and costumes established a simple English/French binary. The Bishop was the most confusing figure, beginning the play as the Bastard's brother who wanted the Falconbridge inheritance to build a cathedral. When he later appeared as a cardinal and the Pope's emissary, he announced that he had been promoted and the rest of the characters merely shrugged as the play proceeded. Perhaps the most effective character revision was that of King Philip, who presented himself as a war-weary pacifist opposed to conflict with England on moral principles. He changed dramatically when the Dauphin was decapitated (rather than the nonexistent Austria), at which point Philip delivered an emotional speech renouncing his peaceful desires and pledging to fight to the death against John.

Although Elinor announced in the first scene that Arthur might have a legitimate claim to the English throne, the primary conflict was not over legitimacy but legacy. The Dauphin, in the opening scene with John and Elinor, mentioned a prophecy that whoever became king after John would be renowned as one of the greatest kings of England. So rather than with his legal hold on the English crown, John was preoccupied with his successor's reign.

The subplot...

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Fixing King John

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M. G. AUNE, *California University of Pennsylvania*

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