



'BURGH VIVANT

An article of importance – a review of “Or,”

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By Michael “Buzz” Buzzelli, 'Burgh Vivant

Poet, playwright and spy Aphra Behn (Georgia Mendes) welcomes King Charles II (Dylan T. Jackson) into her life and into her bed in “Or,” a play about England’s first female playwright by Liz Duffy Adams.

Once the king resumes his throne, after the death of Cromwell, he frees Aphra from Debtor’s prison. She becomes the king’s paramour, but also earns the affection of the foul-mouthed sex symbol, actress Nell Gwynne (Katie Sacks).

The playwright is astonished when Lady Mary Davenant (Sacks, again) comes to her home and offers her a chance to mount her play (Davenant was the first British woman to manage a theater company). Just then, her former lover and fellow spy William Scot (Jackson, again) comes to town with information about a plot to kill the king (the one in her bedroom), and all hell breaks loose.

While all the people in the story are real, there’s no evidence that anything in the play really happened, but it’s a wild romp.

Mendes delivers long passages of dialogue with pluck and verve. She is a captivating lead. It’s a darn good thing, because her character, Aphra, is on stage nearly the entire show.

Half the fun of “Or,” is watching the actors switch to one character to another. Sacks is hilarious delightfully nattering away as Lady Davenant. Minutes later, she transforms herself into the gruff, flatulent maid, Maria. Her Nell is also sexy and provocative.

Jackson, too, zips around behind the scenes, exiting as one character and entering as another, in a completely different wardrobe. It’s an impressive feat with an excellent cast.

Kim Weild does a fantastic job directing all the madness. While it sounds like an Elizabethan comedy, it looks like a French farce, with characters hiding in bedrooms and wardrobes. All of the actors have to be on top of their game to pull off the comings and goings as well as recite poetry as if it were day-to-day speech.

Excellent scenic design by Dana Weintraub turns the stage into a well-appointed lover's nest in the 17th century, with lovely cursive musings scrawled on the walls.

The costumes are stunning. Claire Mildred does a particularly splendid job adorning Jackson's King Charles in royal vestments. She swaths him in layers of red and pink and caps it off with enormous red footwear tied up in pink bows.

In between the comedy, Adams makes some salient points about love, sex and gender identity. They sort of sneak up on you. There's also a tremendous optimism in "Or," and you will bounce out of the theater feeling renewed. Let's hope for a thousand years of peace.

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