

# SEATTLE WEEKLY

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NEIL CORCORAN

*The Winter's Tale.* Shakespeare's story of jealousy and forgiveness is pushed into the realm fantastic with director Mark Harrison's masterful reimagining. Stark, evocative sets and skilled use of color set the Bard's story free on an open but rich stage, and deliver a beautiful fairytale with real heartwarming power. Strong performances by Paul Stetler and Jayne Muirhead, with the comic genius of Troy Fischnaller and a fine supporting cast, are powerfully enhanced by the minimal design, nuanced costumery, and delicate lighting. They suggest an unplaceable pan-asian aesthetic that lends a timeless quality, while the use of paper cranes, puppetry, and sailing ships conjures an air of fantasy. The bear alone should not be missed. The strong production team very effectively maximized the Center House Theatre's intimate setting with original work, and propelled this lesser-known comedy into a wonderfully memorable tale. Center House Theatre at Seattle Center, 206-733-8222, [www.seattleshakespeare.org](http://www.seattleshakespeare.org). \$18-\$32. 7:30 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun. Ends Sun. Nov. 19.



Tuesday, October 31, 2006

## **On Stage: Bizarre 'Tale' is clever and superb**

By JOE ADCOCK  
P-I THEATER CRITIC

William Shakespeare's most troublesome stage direction occurs in Act 3, Scene 3 of "The Winter's Tale." It reads, "Exit, pursued by a bear."

Directors cope with the moment with tricks ranging from dressing an actor in a bear suit (ridiculous) to relying on growls and shrieks in the dark (cop out). Seattle Shakespeare Company director Mark Harrison and

his puppet designer, Douglas N. Paasch, turn this often embarrassing moment into a high point in a production that is just one high point after another.

I won't tell you exactly how the bear business is handled. It is wonderfully ingenious. And so this show goes, wonderful in both senses: No. 1, generally excellent, and No. 2, full of wonders.

The story is bizarre. It starts with a jealous madman raising havoc. It ends with marvels, joy, incredibly good luck, reformations and love in multiple forms: filial, paternal, maternal, romantic, marital and fraternal.

As the madman, Paul Morgan Stetler illuminates a role that in most productions is merely dreary and preposterous. The jealous king that Stetler portrays could be a case history from a psychopathology textbook. He is sarcastic and contemptuous. His paranoia has a scope of 360 degrees. Everyone around him is suspect.

As a woman who breaks through the madman's circle of terrified and fawning courtiers, Jayne Muirhead is a dynamic combination of dread, desperation and rage. As the madman's son, 12-year-old middle-schooler Spencer Clark touchingly depicts a kid whose antennae are picking up signals that take him from jolly to confused to distraught.

Believe it or not, during the same scene in which a man has a horrendous run-in with a hungry bear, "The Winter's Tale" departs from nightmare terror and turns into a romantic comedy.

Troy Fischnaller is brilliantly dim as an innocent young shepherd. Similarly brilliant and dim is Troy Misklevitz as a criminally cynical peddler/entertainer. Chris McKeon and Elena Wright do the boy-meets-girl honors. They are charming, never more so than during a robust dance choreographed by Wade Madsen.

The dancing combined with costumes by Melanie Taylor Burgess and music by Karl Fredrik Lundeberg place the action squarely in, um, Tibet. No, make that Turkistan. No, really, it must be the part of Outer Mongolia that abuts Paraguay. Anyway ... some really, really far away and long ago exotic place.

"The Winter's Tale" plays at the Center House Theatre, Seattle Center, through Nov. 19. Tickets are \$18-\$32, groups of 10 or more \$16 a person; 206-733-8222 or [www.seattleshakespeare.org](http://www.seattleshakespeare.org)