

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead

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Where do characters go when they die on stage? An easy answer would be to say they simply cease to exist until conjured by another cast in a new production. However, maybe, just maybe these unfortunates float in a parallel limbo, perplexed and frightened by their new surroundings yet very much alive, albeit in a space far from the audience and the life they knew. This is the intriguing concept at the core of Nu Sass Productions' slimmed down rendition of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Tom Stoppard's alternatively comic and tragic piece of existentialist theater.

The title characters are ripped from the pages of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, wherein they are actually supporting characters notable only for their status as Hamlet's childhood friends and the way in which they famously meet their collective end. Stoppard's choice to elevate Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to lead status while reducing the likes of Hamlet, Claudius, and Ophelia to ancillary roles permits analysis of the Bard's well-known work from a totally unique angle. As the two blighted leads debated probability and karma and wrestled with their own mortality, I found myself enchanted by the simple, refreshing idea that even supporting characters, while normally not given much consideration, can indeed possess emotional lives just as deep and as rich as any Hamlet or Romeo.

The all female cast does not disappoint. These ladies bring a level of skill and polish to their performances that I was definitely not expecting in a Fringe show. Even in the steamy upstairs Redrum theater packed tight with sweaty strangers, the two leads overcame my mild distraction and discomfort and quickly pulled me into their world with their easy repartee of philosophical musings, good natured ribbing, and lighthearted competition. Tiffany Garfinkle delivers an engrossing, wide-eyed performance as the relentlessly logical Guildenstern, while Aubri O'Connor provides the perfect counterpoint in a warm, disarming turn as the easygoing Rosencrantz.

The supporting actresses, led by the charismatic Prairie Griffith as the shameless Player, each excel in multiple roles, portraying with equal success both roguish traveling actors and, within their own play-within-a-play production of *Hamlet*, proper Shakespearean courtiers. They put on an impressive display, effortlessly oscillating between bawdy, lowbrow antics and courtly behavior and delivery most worthy of the Bard's immortal language.

Take some time out of your busy schedule to check out this show. It tackles universal questions of purpose and mortality with special performances, which simultaneously elicit peals of joyous laughter and send pangs of sadness for the two doomed protagonists into the heart of perhaps even the most jaded audience member. Knowledge of Shakespeare is definitely a plus, but not a requirement for your enjoyment of this well-acted production.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead
By Tom Stoppard Directed by Jobie Watson
Produced by Aubri O'Connor and Emily Todd (Nu Sass Productions)
Reviewed by Ben Demers

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