



BWW Review: Mustard Seed Theatre's Engaging Premiere of TILL WE HAVE FACES

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by Chris Gibson



It's always exciting when a reviewer gets the opportunity to see a new work premiered, and Mustard Seed Theatre is currently presenting an adaptation of the [C.S. Lewis](#) novel *Till We Have Faces* by playwright/director Deanna Jent, and it's a well-done and literate play that captures the prose and style of the author quite nicely. While I was always more attracted to the science fiction of [C.S. Lewis](#), the "Space Trilogy" in particular, I think the show has appeal beyond the fan base of Lewis, and at the sold-out performance I attended it was clear that there's definitely an audience for this material. A

terrific cast under Jent's thoughtful direction brings this novel, and the mythologies that it represents, to life in fine fashion.

The plot revolves around a re-telling of the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche, but told from the perspective of Psyche's sister, Orual. Here, Psyche, a beautiful girl with healing hands, is blamed for the recent drought in the Kingdom of Glome and sentenced to be sacrificed to the shadow creature. Orual, her decidedly unattractive sister, decides to do what she can to stop this from happening, but even with the aid of the Bardia, they only succeed in finding her empty restraints. But, Orual is determined to soldier on and the pair decide to continue their search for the missing Psyche.

Eventually, Orual finds her relation and is stunned by her behavior, especially when she claims to have been freed by the west wind, and when she says she's married to someone she's not allowed to see. Orual is not only confused, but unable to see the visions of a kingdom that Psyche is privy to. Determined to remedy this situation, since it's her belief that her sister may well be married to a monster, she instructs her to



flash a lamp in the person's face so that they will be revealed for what they are. Of course, this all goes horribly awry, because Psyche is actually married to Cupid, and in following Orual's advice she winds up banished. Orual's motives are questioned, especially since she directly influenced the outcome, and the stage is set for the second act to pursue her reactions to the events, as well as providing closure to her relationship with Psyche.

Michelle Hand and Sarah Cannon share the role of Orual, and though you may have to suspend your disbelief a bit to consider either actress suitably "ugly" enough for the part, both do splendid work here. Cannon is brash and headstrong as the Orual, defiant in her beliefs and ready to take on the task of finding her sibling when no one else will. Hand is equally up to task, telling her tale with a considerable amount of regret. [Rory Lipede](#) is appealingly cast as Psyche, and brings an innocent charm to the role. Bess Moynihan rounds out the sisters as Revival, who's too self-obsessed to get involved.

[Robert Mitchell](#) is strong as the frustrated King who's less than fatherly with his female brood, and [Richard Lewis](#) contributes nicely as the Priest of Ungit. Shaun Sheley is properly stalwart as Bardia, who guides the young Orual in her quest to rescue Psyche, and there's a particularly good scene where he trains her on the proper use of a sword in battle. [Gary Glasgow](#) does an exceptional job as Fox, a Greek slave/teacher, who's employed by the King to educate his children.

A strong supporting cast includes: Jill Ritter (Priestess), Jean Lang (Batta), Leslie Wobbe (Lady Ansit), along with Justin Lebrecht and Phillip Bettison.

Deanna Jent's direction is well conceived and executed by the entire cast, and Jent also fares well in adapting this work for the stage. The play is a bit talky at times, but at least you're hearing well written dialogue. Dunsai Dai's scenic design fits the atmosphere of the piece with its rustic faux-stone look, and there are enough levels and entrances to allow for it to stand in for a variety of locales. Michael Sullivan's lighting adds to the mood, and it's especially effective when the kingdom that Psyche is living in is suddenly visible in a flash of lightning. Jent, working with Kareem Deanes also provides a sound design that captures your attention, neatly conveying the right feel for this piece.

Whether you're a [C.S. Lewis](#) fan or not, Mustard Seed Theatre's premiere of *Till We Have Faces* makes for an entertaining evening of theatre. This production continues through May 1, 2011.

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