

Cymbeline

[Dog's Bollix Irish Pub](#)

May 18-28 2006 | Reviewed by [Imogen Neale](#)

THE BLOOD lipped woman wandering through the crowd, unnoticed by punters still queuing for beer and nuts, illustrated in just a few small drifting steps the power of acting outside the neat, three-walled box that normally contains theatre. Indeed, it was probably only those who were attracted to the shiny promise on her lips and the lazy kick in her heels that began to wonder: has the play begun? It would have been only a fleeting thought, because she drifted away, almost as though she had come out to see if we were worth watching and, upon deciding that no, we weren't, she's gone to back to from whence she'd come.

For most in the audience, the Peripeteia Players performance of Shakespeare's **Cymbeline** began with the sound of two pairs of well shod feet trotting closer; a tightly dressed Doctor and the same blood lipped woman, nattering their way into centre stage. The Doctor, excited by the readiness of his short-skirted companion, hugged his satchel to his chest while she, all fingers and strings, tried to draw him closer. Obviously not one whose virtue is patience, she grabbed his hand and parked it, oh so tenderly between perky one and perky two.

Looking just like one of the bar staff delivering food to the audience (how much better does it get; you can order food and drinks throughout the entire play, rustling peanuts without even raising the faintest blush) a waitress arrived with a tea stand full of mini-club sandwiches. Popping the little triangles into their mouth, their conversation established the where, why, who and how of *Cymbeline's* 1610 world. Which goes something like this:

The King is a widow, he has three children. Two of them; twin boys were kidnapped when they were three years old (they would now be 23). That leaves Imogen, his daughter (nice name, I know). She is in love with Leonatus, the earnest young man she had grown up with. He thankfully, is in love with her and so, in secret, they get married. The King, however, finds out, gets very angry and banishes Leonatus from Britain. Imogen is distraught and so, in time, goes looking for him. War breaks out, people get killed, drugs get taken, someone loses their head and a slimy French man hides in a trunk.

To do this, the 10 strong Peripeteia Players use every inch of the Dogs Bollix – a traditional Irish pub in Auckland; the toilet area is their changing room, the bar area is their passage way; the floor is centre stage and the seats around that – filled with supping punters – are their confidants. Much like *Milo's Wake*, a play performed here last year and soon to be performed in Hamilton, theatre like this works because it is so intimate, so immediate and so interactive. 1610 Britain may be another world but the story, as it unfolds before you, feels as pressing and as all consuming as if it was actually happening for the very first time; here and now.

I'm unsure what accolades to gush at the actors, suffice to say, they all played their repertoire of characters (any given actor playing at least one other part) with such conviction and understanding that for the two hours or so we were playing *Cymbeline*, there were no actors in the pub – just some people with 17th Century sensibilities mingling, rather energetically, with those with 21st Century mind sensibilities.

When I interviewed about eight of the *Players* on [95bfm](#), they told me, unanimously, that they thought the last scene was the most challenging. Why? Well apparently it is a complete departure from Shakespeare as we (here I'm talking to those who are not Shakespeare scholars) know it. Armed with this (what I took to be a warning) I tried to suspend my judgment as the last scene unfolded; I thought – just let it happen and then think about it later – that way your at least actively trying to be open minded.

But the last scene is perhaps the most perfect thing about the play; it's like listening to some grand old dame weave a silky story about lavish lifestyles and late lunches only to have her turn around at the very end, when you've decided that yes, she is living in a fairy world, and undercut the whole pompous affair with a very shard, self-reflexive joke the mocks itself to its very core.

This is theatre that includes people, moves people and shows them, ultimately that art is supposed to be about the people and for the people; indeed, it's theatre as Shakespeare intended it.

Congratulations Players.

Listen to the interview on 95bfm: www.95bfm.co.nz/default,9750.sm

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Review originally published on The Lumière Reader at <http://lumiere.net.nz/>