

arts

Robert Trehy shines as Cervantes in 'Man Of La Mancha'

By HEIDI BEELER
Collegian Staff Writer

If the Festival Theatre offered you the chance to see Robert Trehy walk onto an empty stage wearing a nondescript suit with only a bare light bulb hanging overhead, sing "The Impossible Dream" and then walk off again, I'd say take it!

At the opening performance of "Man Of La Mancha" Thursday night, Trehy's powerful voice rang above even the trumpets and trombones of the 16 piece pit band. And when he let go of the final note of the number, the audience stopped the show with a thundering applause that made him stand motionless in a noble profile for at least twice the time of the applause for the other numbers.

theatre review

Now add to that a leading lady with a voice to match, a comic cohort, a full chorus, 16th century Spanish costumes, the original Broadway set design, and some of the classic exploits of Cervantes' Don Quixote, and you have one of the strongest productions of the season.

With music and lyrics by Mitch Leigh and Joe Darion, Dale Wasserman's adaptation of "The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote" includes a part of Cervantes' life story along with Don Quixote's by using a play-within-a-play structure. The play opens as Cervantes (Trehy), a penniless gentleman and playwright, and his servant (Yusef Bulos) are led into a Spanish dungeon by the knights of the Inquisition (Gary Perdue, Phil Gibson and D. John Hefferon). Here Cervantes must await a trial with the Inquisition. "He foreclosed on a church," his servant tells the other prisoners, "and someone had to tack the notice up on the church door."

Once the guards leave, the prisoners tackle the pair and steal their belongings, including a trunk of stage props and Cervantes' classic manuscript about the mad knight. As the "governor" of the thieves (Gil Abern) threatens to burn the package with his work, Cervantes pleads to be allowed to show them what the manuscript contains. So, donning a scruffy prop beard and some rusty armor, Cervantes and his servant become Don Quixote and his practical and faithful squire, Sancho Panza.

The prisoners take up the other roles of the story, as the knight battles a windmill supposing it to be an ogre, takes an inmyard and its rough peasants for a castle and courtly people, and falls in love with Aldonza (Lelani Mickey), a

kitchen wench, while insisting she is a virtuous lady. And as the characters sing, dance and fight their way through the tangles of reality and perception, the knights of the Inquisition interrupt to remind Cervantes of his own reality and the trial awaiting him.

Directed and choreographed by Darwin Knight, the cast did a good job with the music, dance and spectacle of the show. Trehy's voice could be both powerful with noble intention and gentle with sincere sentiment at need. Mickey's voice was also expressive, as she varied between a harsh bawdy strength and a soft bewilderment. While Bulos' voice was a little raspy next to Trehy's clear operatic one, it carried well and was fitting for the comic squire who tried to be as noble as his master but didn't really understand what their quest was about.

The cast as a whole had a nice blend, although when most of them sang as individuals their voices didn't always carry well. The dance numbers were interesting, including a gypsy belly dance and a horrifying gang rape number in which Aldonza was passed from muleteer to muleteer as the rest looked on and smiled while clapping their hands to the music. The comic fight dance, in which Don Quixote chlobers the muleteers almost by accident with spinning ladders, a cast-iron pot and his broken lance, went by a little too quickly, though. Because Don Quixote has been taunted mercilessly by the muleteers and told his quest will never succeed, it's important that he and his impractical virtue can win here. And he won the fight a little too easily, too quickly to let you feel the marvel of that victory.

While the over-all performance was wonderful, the acting itself wasn't as good. Trehy was excellent at being steadfastly virtuous and brave, but when Cervantes breaks down at the sight of the knights of the Inquisition, you couldn't see the fear underlying that proud exterior. So in the end when he is truly brave and willing to face any hardship, you don't realize that Cervantes has changed with the prisoners because of his own play. Mickey's Aldonza was too easily changed from the tough, pragmatic whore to a despairing woman, and it made the scene in which she accepts his ideals melodramatic.

Bulos was the acting highlight of the show. Clad in rust-colored pantaloons and standing a half-head shorter than Trehy, he danced about the stage, delivering missives, badly tooting fanfares on a battered bugle and picking his master up off the ground when needed. Bulos' energy and character development really brightened the production.

Jim Caldwell was also good as the amazed old barber whose shaving basin becomes Don Quixote's enchanted

Golden Helmet of Mambrino. Catherine Dupuis had a strong voice as Don Quixote's proper niece. And James LeVaggi sang a gentle, although a little too soft, tenor solo as the padre who isn't sure if it's worse to let Quixote remain mad or to take his ideals away from him.

With its Tony award-winning set recreated by Howard Bay and Douglas R. Maddox, lighting designed by Pat Simmons and costumes designed by Marie Anne Chimont, the technical half of the production set an eerie mood. A blue gloom poured over the dungeon's stone floor, as the overture played and the prisoners crawled out of the corners. And when the knights of the Inquisition first appeared at the top of the drawbridge staircase 20 feet off



Searching for the impossible dream in the Festival Theatre's production of "Man Of La Mancha" are (clockwise from top left) Yusef Bulos as Sancho Panza, Robert Trehy in the lead role of Cervantes/Don Quixote and Lelani Mickey as Aldonza. The production runs through August 7 at the Playhouse Theatre.

comics, etc.

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Across

- 1 Tetters
- 6 Accord
- 12 Fanon
- 13 Lustrous fabric
- 14 Slide show caller
- 16 Distributed
- 17 Greek long E
- 18 Malign
- 20 Extra
- 22 Weep
- 23 Senator Ervin
- 26 Part
- 27 Addition
- 30 Myself
- 31 Tea tree
- 32 It is so
- 34 Shaved
- 36 Rocky peak
- 38 Zero
- 40 Pike-like fish
- 41 Extols
- 44 Egyptian god
- 46 Small horse
- 48 Disfigure
- 50 Cosmetic
- 52 Soften
- 53 Scuff
- 54 Concerning

Down

- 1 Toga
- 2 Eligh
- 3 Pageantry
- 4 Cervid
- 5 Grain
- 6 As above
- 7 Noteworthy
- 8 Detail
- 9 Spots
- 10 Person
- 11 Man's nickname
- 15 Mallet-law
- 18 Rival
- 21 Author Clarence —
- 24 Yankee
- 25 Grooms
- 26 Hal of Fame member
- 27 Indicated
- 28 Barrel stove
- 30 Sashib
- 32 Mexican dish
- 37 Detecting devise
- 38 Started
- 42 Half prefix
- 43 Blood fluids
- 45 Adjoining
- 46 Channel
- 47 Medieval king
- 49 Bog
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