

## Tempest rages in glorious setting

The Tempest at  
Tynemouth Priory

TURNING Tynemouth Priory into a giant open-air theatre was ambitious to say the least but 1399 Theatre Company certainly made it work with their production of *The Tempest*.

A promenade staging makes the most of the atmospheric backdrop with six main performance areas dotted around the 11th Century ruins.

*The Tempest* is Shakespeare's epic tale of magic, romance, revenge and forgiveness set on a deserted and enchanted island where Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, and his daughter Miranda have been shipwrecked for 12 years following a plot to overthrow him.

Prospero conjures up a storm with the help of Ariel, a spirit that he freed, and ensures that those who plotted against him are also marooned on the island.

The romance that blossoms between Miranda and his enemy's son, Ferdinand, touches Prospero, leading him to give up his magic and forgive his enemies.

Despite a rather ill-defined beginning, the audience soon warmed to this promenade style, following the beckoning 'spirit guides' to each new stage area.

Tynemouth Priory just happens to have a First World War gun battery, which is perfect for enacting the stormy shipwreck at the start.

With school parties to entertain, the cast had a tough job and some of the more wordy opening scenes had them fidgeting a little. But, just at the right time, the first comic interlude arrived.

Daniel James Lake steals the show as Caliban while Christopher Goulding and Steve Hawksby give self-assured performances as drunken duo Trinculo and Stephano. All keep their Geordie accents and are the more believable for it.

As Prospero, Peter Harrison gives a sterling performance, holding the show together, while Chris Price and Bob Webb are polished as the plotting villains Sebastian and Antonio.

But the location is the star. There is no need for the gimmicks so often used to make Shakespeare "accessible".

The music, live and recorded, weaves subtly into the action. The lighting, complementing the ruins superbly, is equally impressive.

One word of warning: wrap up warm.

●The Tempest is on until August 11. Tickets from Whitley Bay Playhouse and Newcastle Tourist Information Centre.

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