

Classic Chic's production of *Corleone: the Shakespearean Godfather* lays a convention on top of a gimmick—and it works. ~ Colin Thomas

In *Corleone*, playwright David Mann reimagines the plot of the first *Godfather* movie through the filter of Shakespearean language and, to a certain extent, Shakespearean sensibilities. Characters speak in iambic pentameter and are less likely to die in a hail of bullets than from a poisoned pearl in their wine goblet. In this production at least, the costuming stays in the same time period as the film: 1945 to 1955.

Thematically, there's no substantial justification for this Shakespearean take on of the lives of a Mafia family: we don't gain any insight from it, and the gravitas has always been there. But it is kind of fun: Mann refers to Shakespearean texts throughout. We hear echoes of *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, when one of the characters introduces "five households all alike in dignity in New York City, where we set our scene." Sometimes, the text is clumsy: how many times can you happily hear rhymes for "an offer he cannot refuse"? But, for the most part, the language in Mann's script is surprisingly elegant. Increasingly drawn into mob warfare, for instance, Michael, the Mafia don's youngest son, who wants to live a crime-free life, wonders, "Can I still hold myself a stranger in my father's house?"

Most importantly, director Mindy Parfitt and the artists of Classic Chic take the script seriously and deliver an emotionally resonant and physically handsome interpretation.

All of the actors in Classic Chic productions are female. Mostly, this strikes me as an excellent strategy for getting more women onto our stages, but there are other benefits, too. In *Corleone*, it's fascinating to watch as Corina Akeson, who plays Michael's hotheaded brother Sonny, kicks the shit out of their adoptive brother, Tom. Akeson's Sonny relishes the violence, and the actor's femaleness highlights the viciousness while simultaneously exposing it as human rather than crudely gender-specific. And, in the context of female actors doing male drag, it's impossible not to notice how much performance there is in our accepted notions of femaleness. Kaitlin Williams, who plays Michael's fiancée, Kay, doesn't camp things up, but this gender-modified production sets in stark relief the accepted norms of femaleness: the vulnerability, the lack of agency, the grace. Both of these characterizations are excellent, by the way. Williams is particularly touching in a scene in which she reacts to being abandoned.

Playing Michael, Stefania Indelicato brings commanding intelligence, stillness and depth. And, with thickened eyebrows and painted-on sideburns, she is smolderingly handsome.

Nicola Lipman plays the don, Vito Corleone, with a persuasive sense of moral exhaustion and cold confidence. And I also particularly enjoyed Michelle Martin as the macho Tom and Colleen Winton as the sinister Sollozzo, who is the head of a rival family.

Heidi Wilkinson's set, which was painted by Omanie Elias, is gorgeous. On both sides of Pacific Theatre's playing area, Elias has created murals. In each, a single fruit tree—are they orange trees?—stands on an aquamarine field. The edges of the murals fade into rust. The palette is sumptuous and the elegant imagery evokes both Italian restaurants and antiquity. I want one in my house.

Corleone isn't deep, but it is a satisfying diversion.

CORLEONE: THE SHAKESPEAREAN GODFATHER by David Mann. Directed by Mindy Parfitt. A Classic Chic production at Pacific Theatre on Friday, February 3. Continues until February 25.