

THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE Sam Wanamaker Playhouse

What a great pleasure to attend this very beautiful new theatre for the first time: intimate, warm and candle-lit, you're made to feel welcome by the cordial attendants and feel ready for an enjoyable theatre experience. And you certainly get it in this delightful production.

The play starts in typical Globe fashion. The cast bounce on and announce they are going to do a piece called *The London Merchant*, a new comedy of manners by Francis Beaumont; but before they can begin properly, there's a commotion in the audience – two people in the front row – a London merchant - a grocer in the Strand (Phil Daniels) and his wife (Pauline McLynn) who demand that the company include a part for their apprentice, Rafe, who wants to play an heroic Knight. The company argues that there isn't any kind of Knight in their play, but after some very funny to and fro, the company reluctantly give in and the rather dim Rafe (an excellent Matthew Needham) becomes the Knight of the burning pestle in a strange sub-plot that involves some Don Quixote-like antics. The action proceeds with continual hilarious interruptions from the front row including the very noisy eating of popcorn (until the bag is confiscated by one of the company!).



The play combines salty colloquial prose with charming songs, a great score by Nigel Hess and there are some delightful performances including Paul Rider's somewhat demented Old Merrythought who looks like a cabbage on legs and sings on every entrance. Director Adele Thomas's production skips along at a nifty pace and Hannah Clark's costumes are a feast for the eyes.

In 1607 *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* was one of the first madcap, mash-up, screwball comedies to hit the English stage and this production celebrates that with great wit and style. Highly recommended.

Ted Craig

The Knight of Burning Pestle plays until Sunday 30 March 2014
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