

Antony and Cleopatra

Kim Cattrall could have done with either a fully realised new conceptualisation, or a full-blown classical reprisal



By [Sophie Rose Walker](#), Muse Editor (2011/12)

Saturday 15 September 2012



Chichester Festival Theatre

Director: Janet Suzman

Starring: Kim Cattrall, Michael Pennington

Run 7th-29th September

Rating: **

Shakespeare's romantic tragedy is powerful and sexually charged, and Kim Cattrall of *Sex and the City* fame, is a symbol of a sexually powerful woman. Yet somehow, although casting her in the title role would appear to be a perfect marriage, the production just fell short of having the modern sexual power it was meant to have.

This wasn't Cattrall's fault, however, her performance was actually very accomplished. She's played Cleopatra before; in 2010 in a different production but with the same Director Janet Suzman, at the Liverpool Playhouse, the city she was born in. One could imagine most of the posh old prunes in the audience being turned into a strumpet's fool at the ruin of her magic.

The poshest old prune of them all was Michael Pennington who played Antony. The veteran Shakespearean actor certainly added a certain charm and eccentricity to the role, but he was just a tad too beguiled and tad too old to be 'pillar of the earth' material.

The foibles over the central relationship were partly due to a slight lack of chemistry on the actors' part, but essentially the real downfall of this play, was its context. The setting was negligibly determinable, being vaguely contemporary like a Moroccan style Soho Loft, yet the characterisation was decidedly circa 1700. This was neither a fully realised new conceptualisation, nor a full-blown classical reprisal, and the lack of creative decision here meant the acting struggled to find its base.

Octavius, played with spot-on neurosis by Martin Hutson, was dressed in a modern suit, to invoke the idea

that he really was a businessman fresh out of Canary Wharf. Pompey and his comrades looked like Rwandan rebels, and the Roman accessory of choice appeared to be a pink or purple pashmina. To add to the incongruity of these stylistic details, the musical interludes between scenes were reminiscent of a Game of Thrones video game soundtrack, and the set was too minimalist to help contextualise the piece.

The outstanding 2011 National Theatre production of Comedy of Errors (Twelfth Night) with Lenny Henry proved that audiences expect to be offered a slice of Shakespeare in an entirely new context, and, if it's done well it can be seriously good. So, I don't think it's fair to say Kim Cattrall's 'salad days' are over, but she and the cast, deserved a more interesting, original production. And you'd think for the second time around, she'd have been looking for one.



One comment

RC Mills

16 Sep '12 at 7:30 am

You are too kind. It was, on the pre press night showing, a mediocre show to say the least. This noisy, restless and faintly ludicrous production failed because it lacked any chemistry between the leads. But with Antony appearing to be around ninety and Enobarbarus even older one was left boggling at the casting in the first place. Martin Hutson - playing Octavius actually - was the only actor who seemed to have any clear idea of what he was trying to do. Of some of the supporting performances the less said the better.

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Antony and Cleopatra is a tragedy by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written sometime between 1603 and 1607. It was first printed in the First Folio of 1623. The plot is based on Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's Lives and follows the relationship between Cleopatra and Mark Antony from the time of the Parthian War to Cleopatra's suicide. The major antagonist is Octavius Caesar, one of Antony's fellow triumviri and the future first emperor of Rome. The tragedy is a Roman play Antony and Cleopatra was first listed for publication in 1608, but evidence strongly suggests that the play was written and performed one or two years earlier. No evidence exists to indicate that Antony and Cleopatra appeared in print before its inclusion in the First Folio of 1623; therefore, the First Folio version of the play is considered authoritative.