

THEATER

Subject to Edward

Sure he was a bad king, but he makes for great theater

BY GARY MORRIS

Fans of gay history know Edward II (1307-1327) as the guy who got a hot poker in the ass—and we're not talking in a good way. No, tragic Edward, who's popped up in movies like Mel Gibson's homophobic *Braveheart* and Derek Jarman's homophobic *Edward II* and now in a revival of Christopher Marlowe's play by triangle productions!, was killed in an unusually brutal way at the ripe young age of 20 by political rivals.

Marlowe, a contemporary of William Shakespeare (and, to a few conspiracy theorists, the real author of at least some of the Bard's plays), met his end in a way not terribly unlike poor Edward: He was stabbed to death in a bar at 29.

Also like Edward, Marlowe is generally acknowledged as at least bi and more probably gay, but Marlowe's "perversion" was not the most probable reason for his demise. Rather, he was a freethinker and a likely atheist—worse crimes than queerness in 16th century England.

As fascinating as all this history is, it's not really necessary to know to enjoy director Andy Alcalá's mostly excellent version of Marlowe's play through March 20 at Theater! Theatre! Alcalá, who's gay himself, has effectively collapsed the original's dozens of characters into a mere nine, with many of the actors doing double, triple and quadruple duty. Uniformly strong acting keeps this eloquent, emotional tale of deadly intrigue and, ahem, gaiety among the royals moving with dramatic panache.

In the play's opening, Edward is seen at his most vulnerable, crawling out of a hole in which he's been imprisoned with barely a stitch of clothes. How he got there we learn as the play proceeds through Edward and Gaveston's obsessive love, and wife Isabella's humiliation and subsequent scheming with Duke Mortimer.

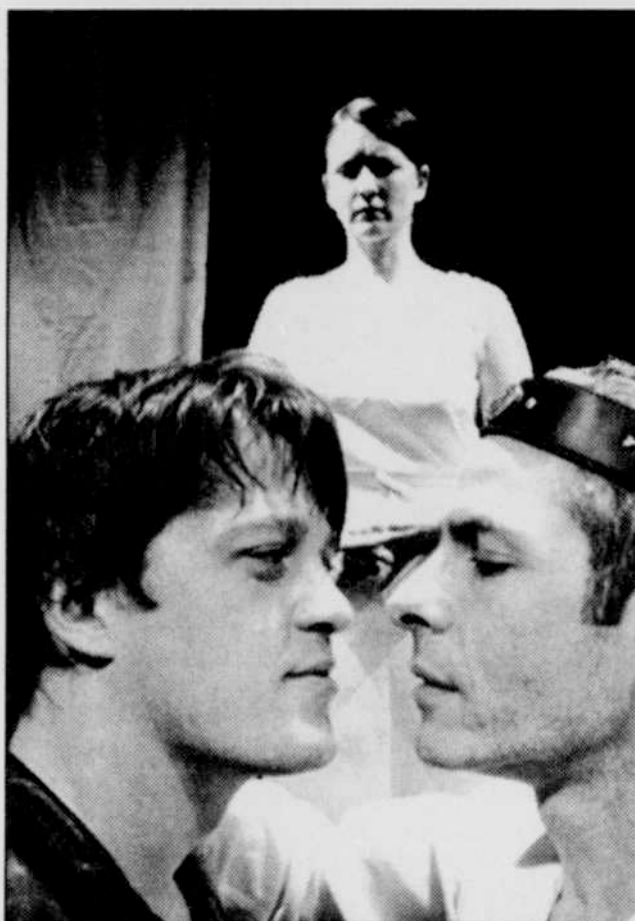
It seems Edward has little time to worry about the war raging in Scotland or the chaos in France—he's too busy diddling his boy toy and denouncing anyone who might criticize (many of whom seem to covet his position).

As usual, the church is also a problem. The bishop says, "God himself is up in arms!" at this affair, but, as Edward snappily retorts, "Why should a king be subject to a priest?"

Edward and Gaveston's scenes, whether together or apart, are the most poignant in the production and form its emotional core. Considering *Edward II* was written in the 1590s, this relationship, unapologetically queer, is downright astonishing.

Yet, despite its antiquity, the work contains a perceptible post-Stonewall sensibility. Modern, too, is its scathing portrait of the church's meddling in affairs of state—and of the heart—that it has no business in. Sound familiar?

Triangle's starkly minimal, monochromatic set forms a suitably spare backdrop to the roiling emotions of the characters, particularly during Edward's frequent, anguished speeches. And the witty updates, not uncommon in selling classic theater to modern audiences, keep things lively. Gaveston, for example, wears tinted shades and slinks around like a Eurotrash *homme fatale*, while flashlights and tuxedos figure prominently as props and couture.



Hell hath no fury like a young queen scorned in *Edward II*

"My idea of adding the [props] was simple," explains Alcalá. "I was interested in creating a timeless place for the world of the play. It puts

the focus on the text and story so that you are not worried about a certain phrase fitting or not fitting in a certain time and place."

One of the toughest aspects when producing Elizabethan theater is not letting the formal dialogue alienate or bore audiences. "I have to make sure that the actors all understand what they are saying. The story should come from within the text first. If the actors understand...and we can find the levels, the musicality, beats and all the tools in telling a good story, the relevance of the story can be timeless."

Alcalá's actors move briskly through their paces, with occasionally an almost slapstick feel to the proceedings as they race through one plot intrigue after another. Happily, they also avoid the too-common Phony British Accent Syndrome while giving the majesty of the language its due.

Gay actor Michael Mendelson, who recently appeared in Profile Theater Project's *Klonsky and Schwartz* in the same building, nicely nails Edward's combination of vulnerability, anguish and suicidal pursuit of love. Kelsey Tyler effectively sketches the working-class interloper whose attentions help trigger Edward's demise. Stephanie Gaslin beautifully incarnates Isabella, while Neal Starbird, although sometimes a bit too stentorian in the role, makes a serviceable Mortimer. **J**

triangle productions! presents *EDWARD II* through March 20 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. Tickets are \$17-\$23 from 503-239-5919 or TicketsWest.

Despite being an out gay free-lance writer, GARY MORRIS has never once been hot-pokered or stabbed.

ALL RENTALS—5 DAYS

VIDEORAMA

Arthouse ★ Foreign ★ Cult Classics ★ Gay & Lesbian Documentaries ★ Asian Cult ★ The Latest Chart Busters

The cool—hard to find movies!

DVD/VHS Rental and Sales

Check us out!

3 GREAT LOCATIONS!

The Pearl District

2640 NE Alberta - 503.288.4067
7 Days a week 8 AM - 11 PM

2310 N Lombard - 503.289.8408
7 Days a week 10 AM - 12 AM

NOW OPEN!

1136 NW Lovejoy - 503.796.2825
7 Days a week 10 AM - 11 PM

Locally Owned and Operated

OPEN 7-Days a week

MacRory Tip to Clip

A Place for Everything and Everything in Its Place...

Life is easier with a little organization, whether in your kitchen or on your hard drive. You wouldn't leave all your groceries out, would you? Then don't do it with computer files. Your Macintosh will be happier if you organize things into folders: System Folder (for the computer's files), Applications (programs you use) and Documents (the work you've done), creating logical subfolders within those...

MacRory@macrory.com
(360) 695-6929

"I optimize Macs & teach people to use them."

Real MEN DO ...take responsibility for their own erotic education. Learn about waking up and sustaining erotic energy, giving and receiving pleasure, and expressing your desires.

Celebrating the Body Erotic

Portland • April 24-25
Call Al, 503-493-9421

Body Electric School
www.bodyelectric.org