

BACK STAGE



Kingdom Come

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By Travis Michael Holder

From the first sight of Chris Covics' strikingly evocative rough-hewn wooden constructions held together by huge ropes that jut to the back corners of the playing space, it would be hard not to get swept into a magical world, one immeasurably heightened by Covics' arresting artistry in set and lighting design. Translated by Jesus Lara from Quechua language stories and reverently adapted by Dan Oliverio, who also here directs, this fascinatingly theatrical event chronicling the 16th-century destruction of the Incas uses an intriguing ceremonial style and features a script approximating colloquialisms of that ancient civilization.

Spoken by survivors of various holocausts throughout the last 3,000 years, the play gently emphasizes how many atrocities have been committed throughout history in the name of blind faith and political gain. As the "aggressive red-bearded" Spanish conqueror on a mission to bring Christianity to this "heathen" culture prays, "My blessed mother Mary, give me the courage to cut off this man's head."

Although the sincerity and commitment of this cast is formidable, the performances unfortunately keep this production from achieving what it might have. Oliverio's staging is exceptional, ingeniously using the environmental designs and, like Covics' set, bringing the story directly into the audience area to produce a universal connection. Still, Oliverio has done little to guide his actors toward a unified vision; most are uncomfortable and even clumsy with the play's broad physicality, including exaggerated gesturing and continuous genuflecting, while almost all have a difficult time with the text's repetitive language.

Characters constantly hail one another with the same unusual set of standard stylized greetings, such as "Welcome, my beloved cousin-brother," or recognize their doomed sovereign with the recurring address, "Inca, my Inca." Surely this is in keeping with a respectful deference to the original Quechua language, but only one actor, the highly watchable Jason Imperial, speaks these pronouncements as anything but throwaways to be sped over quickly, as though they all wish their awkward speeches were easier to interpret. These aren't untalented or unwilling performers, mind you, just actors inexperienced in the difficult technique needed to make their challenging dialogue work.