

Greater Lansing Ubiquitous Theatre

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Review: The Monkey King (WTN)

12/3/2015

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THE MONKEY KING is a wild hour-and-fifteen-minute Chinese fairy tale that unleashes “Freshman Power” in a devised performance in the MSU Arena. The place was packed, both onstage (30-plus actors) and in the sold-out audience, with fans whooping at the wild combat choreography and some modern humor overlaid on a centuries-old story of a Buddhist journey to enlightenment; many students also participated on the “script team” to create this play.

This “world premiere devised performance” was written as part of MSU’s “Year of China,” meant to deepen cultural awareness and inclusion. This is a new version of “Journey to the West,” one of China’s best known pieces of classic literature. (Check out the “Dramaturg” notes for more info on the origins.)

It was beautifully directed and choreographed with impressive stage combat. Director Deric McNish mentioned a name, I want to say Jennifer Jacobs, but I could be wrong... as Combat-Mentor, whose name was left out of the program; sorry if I got that wrong. Choreography was Brad Willcuts. Sound, much of it generated by the cast itself surrounding the stage with drums and other vocal/body-made sounds added to the energy. (Grant Cleaveland, Emma Klatt, Lee Jones listed for sound design.)

The two Monkey Kings (young and older) Evan Phillips and Evan Houdek were fired up and energized the entire stage. They embodied a rebellious ambition as they made the quest along with the Pig and the Fish and the Jade Emperor whose stories intertwined as all searched for enlightenment despite demons and twirling battle sticks.

The Monkey King runs through December 6 in the Arena; buy tickets at the box office (Farm Lane side of the Auditorium Building, corner of Auditorium and Farm Lane) and go downstairs for the show. Dress in layers, since it is a bit warm in the Arena, especially when it’s full.)

Friday, December 4, 2015 at 8:00pm

Saturday, December 5, 2015 at 2:00pm

Sunday, December 6, 2015 at 2:00pm

* Director Pre-Show Discussion, Sunday, December 6, 2015, 1:15.

Tickets are also available from the Wharton Center Box Office; 1.800.WHARTON; www.whartoncenter.com.

Box office at the Arena Theatre opens 1 hour prior to each performance with house doors opening 30 minutes prior. General Admission \$13. Seniors and Faculty \$11. Students \$10.

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This G.L.U.T. website is created and maintained by Aaron Herrbach, under collaboration with Jane Shipley Zussman. Content updates provided by Jane Shipley Zussman.

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