

DEUS EX MACHINA

Synopsis

The great Barcelona Disputation of 1263 set three of the most influential men of their time--a King, a Rabbi and a Friar--on a collision course that would change the destiny of Spain. The King is James I of Aragon, known as James the Conqueror. The Rabbi is Nachmanides, known to his people as the Ramban. And the Friar is Raymond De Penyafort, Father of the Inquisition, canonized a Saint in 1601.

In the Disputations of the Middle Ages, Dominican Monks challenged Jews to debate such hot topics as whether or not the Messiah has come, whether he's divine and whether his name is or is not Jesus. The problem was that the rules of Disputation were such that the Jews always lost, which usually meant forced conversion.

One can only speculate on what would have happened if the rules of Disputation were fair. Deus Ex Machina is such a speculation. It begins with a debate of the above mentioned topics. But quickly moves from a discussion of the truth and falsity of one religion versus another, to a discussion of the deceptive nature of belief, itself.

The plot is full of intrigue. The Rabbi must face the fact that his daughter has fallen in love with a Christian. The King is caught between a distraught Queen and his young Converso lover. And Penyafort is involved in a forbidden gay relationship with his protégé, as he works towards establishing the Inquisition.

Deus Ex Machina is based on actual events lifted from the pages of history with these two provisos: 1) The rules of the Disputation as depicted in this play are fair. And 2) the religious issues disputed in this play are issues that are current today if such Disputations still took place.

Production Notes

The Audience becomes involuntary participants as well as observers. This happens naturally as the actors address the Audience as if they were in a Synagogue, Cathedral, or the Disputation. This process of identification is enhanced by the Voices (a small ensemble of Actors).

At such times the entire auditorium becomes the stage. There is a minimum of props. Scenes are defined by lighting, sound effects and dialogue. Because the Audience is in on the act, sound and lighting equipment can be exposed. Costuming can be symbolic. Stagehands can be seen moving props as well as playing minor roles.

Comments from Theater Professionals:

"An ambitious work presented in a bold and challenging way".

The Soho Theatre in London

"The way the actors involve the audience leaves us with the feeling of being involved in the making of history. A very compelling play with a well-woven plot of Jew vs. Christian, King vs. Church, spirituality vs. fanaticism, all set against the Spanish Inquisition". "A very important subject, given the state of the world today."

Florida Studio Theatre

“The play shows true dexterity with staging concepts and techniques. Particularly effective is the use of the chorus to embody not only a wide array of characters, but to create an atmosphere fitting for each scene. The story is compelling in its ritualistic aspect and truly takes the audience on a spiritual and historical journey that is rich with all the possibilities of live performance.”

The Trinity Repertory Company of Providence

“You are to be congratulated. To be a semi-finalist is no small accomplishment. You are in the company of Edward Albee, Lee Blessing, Kia Corthran, John Guare, Bill Irwin, Melanie Marnich, Keith Reddin, John Patrick Shanley and, of course, the late August Wilson and our much loved Wendy Wasserman. Thank you for honoring the O’Neill with your submission.”

Wendy C. Goldberg
Artistic Director

Amy Sullivan
Executive Director

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