

## ENHANCE YOUR OOB LISTING!

Thumbs up

### Agrippina

By **A. Giovanni Affinito**

Directed by **Alexis M. Hadsall**

**The Theatre Rats**

**Shetler Studio**

**Non-union production (closed)**

**Review by Charles Battersby**

Agrippina has the unique distinction of being the sister, wife, and mother of three different Roman emperors (Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, respectively). History has never been kind to poor Agrippina, who allegedly murdered Claudius to get her son Nero on the throne. Playwright A. Giovanni Affinito doesn't seem to think Agrippina has gotten her due, and has told the story of Nero's rise to power through the eyes of his mother.

Both Agrippina (as played by **Beth McKenzie**) and Nero (**Craig A. Brown**) come off looking relatively well in this playwright's hands. Nero is portrayed as foppish, lecherous, and paranoid, but it's still a more fair depiction than in many history books. Agrippina comes across as almost Medea-esque; not exactly heroic, but certainly sympathetic enough to root for.

Although Agrippina's story began long before Nero became Emperor, Affinito spends the majority of his play dealing with her relationship with Nero. A rudimentary understanding of Roman history helps one to understand the story, but it isn't necessary, since there's enough exposition woven into the text to explain who everyone is. Also, the Theatre Rats have found an interesting and unusual way to provide the audience with a little info on pertinent Roman history.

The back story leading up Affinito's play is told through a lengthy dance piece (written by **Alexis M. Hadsall** and choreographed by **Natalie Neckyfarow**) that precedes the play and shows the poisoning of Claudius and crowning of Nero. This use of dance made *Agrippina* a rather unique theatrical experience, using the two art forms to tell pieces of the same story.

The cast was surprisingly good, given that many of them are right out of college, not to mention the fact that the dancers had to act, while the actors had to dance. The leads, McKenzie and Brown, played their roles strongly, and made a sturdy base for the rest of the large cast.

The Theatre Rats bill this show as "A toga-free creation," and that's true. The costume designs by **Brad Caswell**, **Alexis M. Hadsall**, and **Sara Montblonc** are Roman-esque, though still modern, and absolutely toga-free. The men strutted about in Spartacus-style leather skirts, and most of the women wore loose fitting strappy dresses, although Agrippina and Popaea (**Sara Montblonc**) wore slinky gowns that looked suspiciously as if they came from Victoria's Secret.

The set (designed by Hadsall) might seem simple at first, consisting of the throne, a pair of benches, and some pillows, but these pieces were moved around from scene to scene to create an acceptable impression of different places. Sound design (again Hadsall, with **Anthony Valeria**) was most present during the dance, and included not just music, but some multimedia voice-overs too (in Latin, of course).

The point of view from which this story is told makes this play commendable, but the dance elements, and the classical quality of its writing make *Agrippina* an excellent history play. Roman history buffs will no doubt enjoy it, but so will people who only know Rome from gladiator flicks.

Also featuring **Natalie C. Bridges**, **Brad Caswell**, **Michael Catangay**, **Jim Curtis**, **David Holt**, **Miral Kotb**, **Jedediah McProud**, **Ridley Parson**, **Tim Shestak**, **Jason Shoulder**, and **Lindsay Kitt Wiebe**.)

[Box Score:](#)

Writing: 2

Directing: 2

Acting: 1  
Set: 1  
Costumes: 1  
Lighting/Sound: 1

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