

Audience Review by Jim Pulfer (Facebook)

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Where to start: the visuals were intense and memorable, beginning as you strode onto centre stage in your flowing green robes, politely asking the audience to please turn off any devices not found in 1184! FUN. Continuing with the superbly cast Queen mother, looking for all the world as if she'd just stepped out of a monochrome lithograph from the byzantium period. Each and every member of the cast carefully chosen with pitch perfect costuming. A triumph of both personnel selection and the hard work of seamstresses, jewellers, and make-up artists.

Slowly, as the play unfolds, the sound tracks begin to evolve into a series of punctuating marks, informing and shaping the narrative, and sometimes actually setting the stage for the next scene.

All of that was quite wonderful, but now I'd like to turn to the substantive narration of the script. How the 500 years of peace between Christians, Mohammedans and Jews living in Andalusia Spain was shattered by the poisoning of the Caliph and what it all meant to the Queen, the Prince Ya'qub, the Bookseller, the deeply respected and revered Court Chamberlain Ibn Rushd, who was guided by the unseen and uncast famous Jewish philosopher and physician, Moses Miamondes, and, lastly, and most strikingly, The Judge, a Muslim woman of great stature and importance.

On the highest planes of court intrigue, Jewish philosophy counselled patience and civility as a way through the turmoil, whereas the Judge needed a victim to satisfy the murder of the Caliph. This narrative was expertly and convincingly woven throughout the play, leading to the surprising and tragic charge that Ibn Rushd himself was responsible for the poisoning and should be executed or banished.. Thus plunging the world into the turmoils of the Crusades, the rise of Saladin and the exile of the Jews from Spain back to Egypt, via Morocco. and Palestine.

At the personal level of the various characters it was easier to see how the peace had been achieved and then broken. Small vignettes, as asides, were both amusing and insightful: the egg seller (business is better here); the Prince (as like the Christian Saint Augustine, O God, please save me, but not quite yet, referring to the carnal pleasures of the flesh), the Queen through her stubborn silence as the Judge charged Ibn Rushd, her preferred courtier and confidant. She choosing, instead, and quite wrongly, a quiet life with her new daughter-in-law and son. These things gave the play an authenticity that draws one uncomfortably into the truth of the realities underpinning world shaking decisions.

In short, Azeem, a complete theatric triumph.

As-Salaam-Alaikum, shalom aleichem, Requiescat in pace