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Prometheus Bound

Propelled by a lean script, cut-to-the-quick lyrics and an angst-filled score, this world preem hits the zeitgeist jackpot.

By FRANK RIZZO

It's not been a good year for the world's tyrants. And now, even Zeus is being challenged in a raw and rocking version of "Prometheus Bound," helmed with a fierce rebel spirit by Diane Paulus. Propelled by a lean script and cut-to-the-quick lyrics by Steve Sater and an angst-filled score by Serj Tankian, this world preem hits the zeitgeist jackpot.

Just as she did with her playful "Donkey Show," Paulus turns a nightclub space into a hive of theatrical action. Here she creates a kind of rocking Tahrir Square with a mostly standing audience filling in for the masses as they witness the public suffering of the indie god Prometheus (Gavin Creel). Shackled and writhing, he becomes a defiant hero and ultimate martyr as he brands his former ally Zeus an unjust and cruel master of the universe.

Paulus' ever-shifting and fluid staging does much to energize an otherwise tethered 500 (or so) B.C. play by Aeschylus. Setting its angst to a powerful rock score also gives the work added drive, if not dimension. (Tankian also offers breaks of entrancing singing by a trio of celestials -- Jo Lampert, Celina Carvajal and Ashley Flanagan -- and several poignant songs delivered by Uzo Aduba as Zeus' wandering ex lo.)

The staging and songs enliven what is essentially a discourse: the back story on why Zeus created the ultimate restraining order, punishing Prometheus for giving humankind the gifts of hope and fire.

But a little bondage does not keep a good god down. Even when Hephaistos (Gabe Ebert) urges him to relent, Oceanos (Michael Cinio) implores Prometheus to just go along and Hermes (Ebert again) threatens him with more torture. Also on hand to make life even crappier are Zeus's henchmen Violence (Lampert) and Force (Lea DeLaria, who gets to show off some neat scat singing).

A buff Creel sings strongly and suffers in infinite ways, making this human-friendly god not just noble but knowing -- as in the greater purpose of his torment and its ultimate resolution. But one longs for more variety of tone or even some lighter touches (the jaundiced and fey Hermes just doesn't do the trick).

Still, there's empowerment in this collared revolt and even ecstasy arrives amid the agony in the

work's final moments, ending with a rebel yell and the understanding that in the end right will prevail and the mighty will fall. Even if he's a god.

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