

Arts In LA

Around the World in 80 Days

International City Theatre

Reviewed by Melinda Schupmann



Mark Gagliardi, Michael Uribes, Jud V. Williford, Melinda Porto, and Brian Stanton / Photo by Suzanne Mapes

For nearly 150 years Jules Verne's inventive writings have captured the imagination of other writers, poets, and artists as they create works based on his often fanciful science fiction stories. A delightful case in point is playwright Mark Brown's clever adaptation directed by Allison Bibicoff with a crack team of five energetic actors playing more than three dozen parts.

We all know the story: Phileas Fogg (Jud V. Williford) bets a group of his Reform Club fellows that he can circle the globe in 80 days. Joined by his French manservant, Passepartout (Michael Uribes), he travels by steamer and rail, all the while encountering exotic locales and

perilous mishaps. Around the same time as Fogg is leaving on his adventure, a British bank robbery leads Detective Fix (Brian Stanton) to suspect the wealthy Fogg of the deed, and Fix follows him, placing obstacles in Fogg's way so he can arrest him at the appropriate time.

Trying to describe the plot's machinations and actors' roles is nearly as difficult as Fogg's global endeavors. A particularly amusing scene is an elephant ride utilizing two gray umbrellas, a stack of chairs, and a labeled "trunk" that actors climb on, swaying as they journey. There's a typhoon, Indian uprisings in the old West, and mysterious orange-clad figures to foil. The story is well-anchored by the very proper and precise Williford, epitomizing the unflappable Brit. Uribes contributes acrobatic skill and quick-witted comedy, making a wonderful foil for their risky perils.

Cast member Melinda Porto delights as male and female characters, notably her nuanced portrayal of an Indian princess rescued by Fogg from the funeral pyre of her husband. Mark Gagliardi's facility with accents and quick changes are a large part of the success of the production. Stanton, in addition to his detective portrayal, does yeoman work as other colorful characters.

Staci Walters' global-map backdrop plays its part well, following Fogg and company from London back to England with a moving light along the travelers' path. Donna Ruzika's artful lighting and Dave Mickey's thoughtful sound design add punch to the production. Kim DeShazo's costumes, particularly those which are quick changes, are highly effective.

Bibicoff has her hands full with Brown's challenges. It is noted that he gives few stage directions, allowing for directorial imagination. Thanks to Bibicoff's skills and lighthearted management, this play charms from beginning to end and makes a fine opener for ICT's season.

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