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THE ARTS IN REVIEW - 3/10/86

JULIO CESAR - Shakespeare Festival

A new contemporary version of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. This is George Capewell, back in a moment with a review of JULIO CESAR.

Julius Caesar stands midway in Shakespeare's dramatic career, at a critical juncture. In some ways it is an epilogue to his English history plays; in other ways it introduces the period of the great tragedies. It is an ambivalent study of civil conflict.

As in Richard II, the play is structured around two protagonists rather than one. Caesar and Brutus, men of extraordinary abilities and debilitating weaknesses, who are more like one another than they care to admit. On a more surface level, Julius Caesar is about human blindness to history and how this oblivious state condemns man through a succession of protagonists to repeat one another's errors without intending to do so.

The South Florida Theatre Company has taken this timeless classic and updated it to 1994 and places the presentation in a fictitious Latin American nation known as "The Republic of Corba." The company, wisely tampers very little with Shakespeare's words or intent. Thematically, the work uses one of the most critical problems facing the Latin American countries today: the area's foreign debt, the adaptation addresses itself to the potential sociological and economical impacts resulting from inability to repay the debt, as well as difficulties in negotiating new loans.

In the productions's opening sequence, the United States in recognition of these developments, appoints the first Spanish-American Secretary of State. Through visual projections on two large screens, the major events that have influenced Latin-American life from the 1950's through the current 1994 are dramatically

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JULIO CESAR (continued)

portrayed.

To say the least, Julio Cesar is an ambitious undertaking by this relatively young company. The good news is this production succeeds on almost all levels. John Briggs directs the new work with concise clarity. Briggs only falters slightly in the concluding battle sequences in Act 2, when his pre-occupation with effects of both a visual and aural nature overpower the more important verbal content. The company has unearthed some fine new acting talent in all the productions currently in repertory, but in not of the other works are these special talents so vividly displayed. Michael Mauldin is nothing less than a pure delight as Casca, giving his character a much needed but seldom utilized duality. Daniel Orsekes has given believable but mostly unnoticed performances in the company's other more frivolous works. However, as Cassius, he gives a powerful and riveting performance. In fact, when Oreskes and Maulding are on stage together, this productions soars to very special dramatic heights.

No, Julio Cesar is not the greatest theatrical event of the season, but it certainly is a step in the right direction for a theatrical community that has insisted on being dramatic followers instead of dramatic pathfinders. JULIO CESAR can be seen in repertory with AS YOU LIKE IT and COMEDY OF ERRORS through April 6th at Villa Vizcaya.

For THE ARTS IN REVIEW, I'm George Capewell.