

# The Tempest review – a new spin on an old play

**Northern Stage, Newcastle upon Tyne**

Shakespeare's tale is relocated to a laundry room in this beautifully designed adaptation directed by Phelim McDermott



Tyrone Huggins as Prospero in The Tempest. Photograph: Topher McGrilli

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**D**irector Phelim McDermott takes putting a new spin on an old

play rather literally. Nine actors gather around a spotlit washing machine. A young woman loads it with laundry from a plastic basket, pausing to display a dishcloth illustrated with a sailing ship. Multicoloured from hair to knee-length pleated skirt, she seems dipped in a rainbow whose colours have run. The packet of washing powder in her hand bears her name: Ariel. The machine and the cast judder into action. So begins Shakespeare's tale of the deposed, island-stranded Prospero's magic stratagems to regain his title by shipwrecking his foes.

Let's do a little shaking up of our own and mention first those features so often left until last: music, sound and light. As strongly affective as the performers, they collectively establish the protean qualities of the play. In sight of audience view, at stage side, composer/performer Brendan Murphy

hawk-gazes the action for cues to hymn his instruments of glass, metal, wood and water into “strange noises”. Nick Williams’s wind and wave sound designs subtly suggest the island shapes. Colin Grenfell’s lighting colours the contrasts between nature and magic, between affection and malice: soft greens, pinks and honey yellows modulate with sharp, acid-grey, steel-edged beams. Shifting shadows transform the contours of Becs Andrews’s single-site set – heaps of castaway garments beneath washing lines stretched above like cirrus cloud streaks.



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If the atmosphere is magical, the drama is, as yet, tentative. But the elements are in place for it to develop. Tyrone Huggins’s Prospero convinces as magician and man: he dominates the indigenous Caliban (Peter Peverley’s monster of self-interest) and is tender to his daughter, Miranda (delivered with wonderful, unforced freshness by Jade Ogugua). Eileen Walsh’s Ariel is delicately multilayered – now boisterously mischievous, now trembling towards a humanity she cannot reach. Shipwrecked court characters are clear in perfidy, comic in confusion but, like their bleached-white costumes, lack shading. The more spins this show gets, however, the brighter it is likely to become.