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Photo: Daniel Kontz Design

Almanac Dance Circus Theater Catapults Greek Myths into Science Fiction

by Jonathan Stein

In their most fully-realized, ensemble-generated work since their founding in 2013, Almanac Dance Circus Theater has created a FringeArts hit in *Exile 2588*. They've forged together the Greek exile myths of Io and Prometheus, fast-forwarding these victims of tyrannical power into a sci-fi future and telling a new myth through the physical language of acrobatics and breakdance.

Music duo Chickabiddy, comprised of composer/musicians Aaron Cromie and Emily Schuman, act as a Greek chorus, offering ironic commentary on the storyline and tender folk songs on acoustic guitar and mandolin. Prometheus (Nick Gillette), the fire-giver mythically chained in banishment on Mount Caucasus, comes to the rescue of our world of greed and endless wars, bringing eternal life but also ending "mirth and birth." The song "If I Were Infinite" aptly captures this future. He is exiled, of course, and we see a future, centuries later, where all is tranquil, emotional outbursts are "regulated," and "consensus" reigns. So much for helpful, utopian interlopers. Yet consensus unison movement is interrupted by Cromie's dissonant harmonica blasts and the involuntary outbursts of acrobatics from humans still in need of regulation.

The brilliance of the show resides in its ability to inventively weave narrative with physical action—as when Io's (Nicole Burgio) decree of banishment is spit out by a triad of Athenodorous (Ben Grinberg), Themon (Nick Gillette), and Lavinia (Lauren Johns), with an inverted Lavinia supported between and upon the shoulders of the other two: a wicked, Hydra-headed jurist. Io's lonesome exile is in part conveyed by a hypnotic trapeze dance: Burgio constantly shifts her weight and direction while confined to a static trapeze bar. The gadfly characters tormenting her (as Hera's stinging gadfly did in the source material) are imaginatively costumed by Natalia de la Torre with illuminated, skeletal backbones.

Almanac's ever-present, wacky humor is at its best in the Prometheus liver scene. His tormenter, played by Mark Wong (also known in

the hip-hop scene as Metal), repeats a series of split-second body flips and torso rotations as a prelude to a brutal hepatological extraction.

When Io discovers Prometheus's rocky asteroid (in the ancient myth Io met, and was comforted and strengthened by, Prometheus), there is a climactic fight scene, the two gods struggling to connect with one another and ultimately defeating their gadfly captors.

If Greek myth viewed Io as a victim, *Exile 2588* renders her a feminist warrior (enhanced by Burgio's muscular athleticism), and the fount of wisdom who on her return to earth appears to bring human life back into its cycles of birth and death, no longer dependent on godlike interventions.

Exile 2588, Almanac Dance Circus Theater, Painted Bride Art Center, Sept. 8-23, fringearts.com/exile-2588/

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