

The Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham: Friday 15th & Saturday 16th April 2016

“Shakespeare’s Will” by Vern Thiessen, Directed by Marianne Gaston

in association with Rain or Shine Theatre Company

What a lovely touch, programmes presented as a parchment scroll tied with a ribbon.

The bell tolls to mark the Bard is dead, yet long live the Bard as his widow Anne Hathaway enters a **simple yet inspired and striking set**, cleverly designed by Ken Meekings, to recount her life from the time she first set eyes on Bill until his burial.

Anne mostly lives her married life bringing up their children in a single parent existence, interspersed by occasional visits from the great man, 8 years her junior, who’d left Stratford to live in London as “a player and writer” with the Queen’s Men.

Sally Hyde Lomax gives a **splendid and captivating soliloquising performance** as Anne Hathaway, having the audience **totally enthralled**, and at times laughing, in Vern Thiessen’s challenging hypothetical play about William Shakespeare’s wife.



Richard Watson composed some delightful and unobtrusive Elizabethan style music, though personally I would have preferred a virginal or harpsichord instead of a piano.

After the funeral Shakespeare’s sister Joan delivered his Last Will and Testament to his grieving widow, Anne. Instead of immediately reading it we are led through her life, **superbly directed** by Marianne Gaston, via rhetorical conversations and discussions between herself and Bill; her father; her 3 children, Susanna and twins Judith and Hamnet; her servants and her detested sister-in-law.

Finally Anne unfurls Bill’s Last Will and Testament only to hear him deliver (Anthony Young) some quite unexpected surprises. But what and to whom has he Devised and Bequeathed? I will not ruin the surprises for those that do not know and only say you really should see this production to find out for yourselves.

If you’re not able to get a ticket to see the play tomorrow, Saturday 16th at the Everyman Studio or on the 23rd at Gloucester’s Wheatstone Hall, and I strongly urge you to try to, you will just have to patiently bide your time until the Company’s (<http://www.rainorshine.co.uk>) autumn tour of this **very entertaining, powerful and thought provoking play**.

Judith Wordsworth

