

NOTES ON THIS ADAPTATION

I love CAMELOT. I love the story. I love the score. Have since I was ten. But in 2009 I was increasingly interested in the idea that there might be another way to approach the material. CAMELOT is traditionally done much like a Shakespearean history- lots of very effective pomp and pageantry. Lots of men in tights and armor and ladies in waiting in pointy hats. All exciting, but what if, I wondered, it were to be done as a story told around a campfire? A saga accompanied by primitive drums and ritual dances. A cautionary tale passed down through ages and now being passed down once more to the people in the theater this very night. After all, isn't Arthur's redemption at the end of the show that his story will live on? That young Tom will tell the legend for the ages? But this sort of storytelling needs to be trim and taut. In order to figure out how to accomplish that I tried an experiment. I began by eliminating anything (or anyone) that did not directly have to do with the Arthur/Guenevere/Lancelot triangle. To my surprise I was left with a clear, concise and still emotionally satisfying narrative for the three. As I explored exactly what additional characters I would need, amazingly I found the answer to be: very few. Three knights, Mordred and young Tom. One woman and seven men. That's it. But what about those big choral numbers? Well, what if the principals not only played their parts but filled in as chorus too? And since they already narrated the action in "The Jousts" and "Guenevere" why couldn't they also narrate throughout the play? The answer is they could. That streamlined the book even further, leaving plenty of room for songs that were often cut, so this could also finally be a CAMELOT that celebrates its complete score.

Here are some guideposts to aid you along your way:

CASTING- The optimal cast size is one woman and seven men. It works really well. It also has resonance around the theme of a powerful woman and the men whose lives she affects. But putting that aside, if your group needs a piece for more players, no problem. Add more Revelers, male or female. Maybe add them to "The Jousts", "Lusty Month Of May" and "Guenevere". More dancers in the ritual opening might be fun. Perhaps we actually see Lady Anne or other Ladies in Waiting. Let them help set the scene, dress the stage. People with musical talent might even play an instrument on stage. More onstage drums are always a good idea. In short, this CAMELOT can be adapted to fit any group's needs. As far as age goes, younger is better. This is a tale of youthful passion and ideals. Cast all three leads with sexy, vital actors in their younger years. And be color blind.

STYLE- This version uses theatrical technique similar to Story Theater. Using it, actors have several options; 1) to narrate the general action; 2) to describe a scene like a stage direction; 3) to describe, in the 3rd person, his or her own actions or feelings; 4) to speak in character in a scene in the traditional sense; and 5) to give "asides" directly to the audience. Difficult and counter-intuitive at first, once mastered it allows for incredible flexibility in acting and storytelling. And it is fun. Hint: For CAMELOT, because the style is so theatrical, it works best if, once in a scene, the acting is as realistic as possible.

STAGING- This version throws open the treasure chest of theatrical tricks. Dig in. First, the greatest trick of all: using the viewers' imagination. A bald branch becomes a forest in winter, an old trunk a boulder, a flurry of torn paper a light snow, a wedding veil morphs into a majestic drape. Add simple platforms, lights and a basic prop or two and a hillside changes to a bed chamber then a jousting field then a dark castle hall. A maypole can become the stake at which Guenevere is set to burn. The audience fills in the scenic details usually done by painters and carpenters. Be creative with this. Find tricks of your own. Don't get bogged down with the literal. And when given the choice, opt for simplicity.

COSTUMES- Simple and evocative but not literal. Give the sense of period without using tights or pointy hats. Anachronism is fine. Be creative. For the most part there are basic outfits to which smaller elements are added. In previous productions Lancelot wore leather pants. The knights wore jeans or camouflage. When they were invested in the Round Table they put on vests. Simple. There is no armor until Arthur finally dons a breastplate before the final battle. We notice then it has been hanging in plain sight the whole show, waiting for him.

Most of all, have fun. Be creative. Tell the tale. Don't let it be forgot.

David Lee

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