

A light-hearted look at serious matters

Patrick Brown, through his numerous plays, has given Jamaicans at home and abroad reasons to laugh.

And his remounted production of Breadfruit Kingdom once again provided the conduit for laughter. It was clear that the lines of the characters were tweaked to reflect more current political scenarios, locally and internationally. Of course, Brown was assisted by a talented, tried and proven cast and crew.

And by all accounts, the director Trevor Nairne and his cast got it right. The punchlines, while not rib-ripping, tickled many funny bones.

But, the seemingly oversized set had the small auditorium of Centerstage Theatre bursting at its seams.

In Breadfruit Kingdom, where King Street (Glen Campbell) rules supreme, his subjects, who are mainly farmers, are highly taxed. At some point they are forced to hand over 95 per cent of what they produce in taxes. And what is the justification for this disproportionate taxation? The King has to feed his "foodoholic" daughter, Princess Street (Teisha Duncan).

Melodramatic end

But the citizens of the Kingdom were not taking the tax increase lying down. Each tax increase results in a demonstration. Finally, the melodrama ended with the 'Fruitians', led by a masked Hunchy (Courtney Wilson), singing a victory song after the King is forced to change his draconian system.

Breadfruit Kingdom may best be described as a patchwork of culture and political ideology. The language of the characters is distinctly Jamaican, names of the royal family capture the names of major downtown streets (King Street, Princess Street and Queen Street), and the costumes are reminiscent of the Elizabethan period, though there are smatterings of more modern garb.

In spite of the disclaimer at the opening, which alludes to an ignorance of any similarity to real individuals, the black hat-clad 'Star Boy', and the use of recognisable gestures and some mannerisms, show an uncanny resemblance to public figures. Thus, credit must be given to the cast of Campbell, Wilson, Duncan, Natasha Fearon, Joan Sappleton, Volier Johnson and Camille Davis for producing such high-quality characterisation.

All except Campbell played more than one role. And of course, aided by costumes, each character was well defined and fantastically presented. Special mention, however, must be given to Johnson in his three roles 'Slim', 'the mad Prince' and 'Star Boy'.

Johnson is no stranger to the stage. He has performed in many productions, locally and internationally. But in these three roles he seemed to have blossomed. From the ridiculous attire and raging gestures of the mad Prince to the lovesick Slim and the stately looking Star Boy, his performance was captivating.

While Johnson was refreshing in his roles, it was Wilson's very entertaining interpretation of Earl Bagalocks, in the "result scene", that generated the most laughter.

Raise your glass to him. Playwright and director must be given the raised glass too.

Keep the glass up for Nairne, who not only utilised the set effectively but spread the action into the auditorium with timely entrances and exits.

Engaging the audience, which at times became another character, was also effective.

Conversely, it is glass down for the set designer. The large set depicting a palace, and decorated by huge pieces of furniture, was too much for the small stage. To compound the problem, the ever-present breadfruit tree with its hanging fruits killed the illusion of the interior of the palace. In other words, the set was not flexible enough for the various settings. It, however, does not detract from the entertainment value of the production. Breadfruit Kingdom is a must-see.