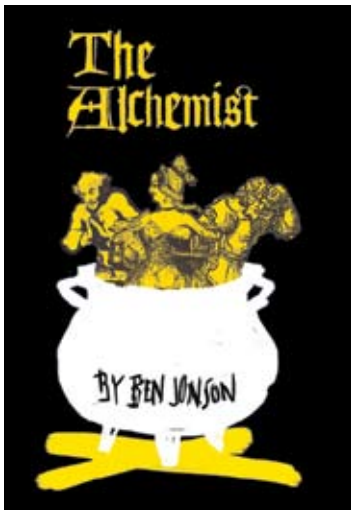


Meet Me at the UCA

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
FALL 2009 STUDENT RECITAL SCHEDULE



The Alchemist by Ben Jonson

Directed by Walt Jones

September 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 8 p.m., and Sunday, September 27, 8 p.m.

Studio Theatre, UCA

\$7/CSU students, \$7/youth (ages 2 – 17), \$14/seniors, \$16/public

About the Play

At any one moment, Hollywood writers are trying to write the next perfect plot; *The Grifters*, *The Sting*, and *Oceans 11* are basically *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson, as it dramatizes the “long con.” The great English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), surmised that *The Alchemist* – first performed in 1610 – had one of three perfect plots, the other two being *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles (430 B.C.), and *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding (1749). Just three in 2,000 years! It’s been said that if it wasn’t for Shakespeare, Jonson would be Britain’s national playwright and his greatest misfortune was having Shakespeare as a contemporary. This would have been news to Jonson as he went to his grave the most celebrated poet of his age. The clever comedy and deception of *The Alchemist*’s perfect plot takes place within six hours in London’s Blackfriars district. In 1610, London was the capitol of lethal

con-artists and money-minded Puritans, where the threat of plague was balanced by the prospect of limitless wealth. *The Alchemist* is flawless, still current satire about greed, image, perceptions and the endless gullibility of people of all social classes. If Jonson had been a Hollywood screenwriter, one could imagine a chart with each storyline represented by a different color string marking plot intersections, and reminiscent of a map of the London Underground - only easier to lose one’s way.

Theatre Students Transition from Shakespeare to Jonson

The Theatre division spent the summer successfully immersed in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, with just three weeks between productions. Jonson was fluent in several languages, including Latin, and his rigorous education is reflected throughout his works. According to Jones, “Jonson is harder to perform than Shakespeare – the language is very arcane, edgier and harder to grasp.”

In selecting *The Alchemist*, Jones revisited his previous experience with this specific Jonson play, having performed in it twice. “I’ve always thought it was the hardest I’ve ever worked so I wanted to share that opportunity with our students,” said Jones. Widely admired for his intricate plots and larger-than-life characters, actors seldom get the chance to tackle Jonson.

To achieve accuracy with the difficult passages, Jones relied on dialect coach Paul Meier, “Paul said he’s never gotten the chance to work on *The Alchemist* in almost 30 years of professional work and reiterated to me and to the students what an incredible opportunity this is for young actors,” said Jones.

Intense Theatrical Experience

The play is being presented in the Studio Theatre, the University Center for the Art’s convertible space that will seat just 100 audience members for this production. “What I wanted was a kind of in-your-face experience for the audience,” said Jones. There will be sawdust over the entire theatre floor and some audience members will sit within two feet of the action. “It is a wild and woolly production, not for the squeamish, and filled to the brim with each one of the seven deadly sins!”

The play’s clever fulfillment of the classical unities and vivid take-no-prisoners depiction of human folly have made it one of the few Renaissance plays, excepting the works of Shakespeare, with a continual life on stage.

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