



John Brown: Trumpet of Freedom

Written by George Wolf Riley and Norman Thomas Marshall

Directed by George Wolf Riley

At St. Marks-in-the-Bowery

131 East 10 St.

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Review by Alicia Haines

The high ceiling and archaic wooden floors of the St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery are fitting for John Brown: Trumpet of Freedom, a tale set in the 1900s. The stage is bare, consisting of a soapbox, walking stick, writing stand, a coat rack with a few old jackets and a noose. Here, John Brown sits on the day of his execution, recounting the events leading up to his imminent martyrdom.

Marshall plays not only the vibrant and violent abolitionist John Brown, but every other individual in the show from Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglas to the courageous Harriet Tubman. Each character helps to fill in the history of Brown's life, from their various perspectives—from the slave to the richest and most cruel slave owner.

With a deep and resonant voice, Marshall is captivating and soulful as he expresses the sad and gruesome events that he's bore witness to. "Men who practice the way of Satan don't deserve to live... Slavery is war," Brown exclaims, "and blood must be shed for the cause." Indeed, he holds a village hostage while he steals a cache of weapons, "all in the name of the mighty Lord." He and his sons visit the seven worst slave owners and one by one, slay them without mercy. Although his army is small, Mr. Brown demonstrates that he is a force to be reckoned with. He faces his martyrdom with grace and satisfaction, knowing that it will be an act fulfilled by God and something that will be forever remembered by future generations ("An example must be set and I will be honored to do so in the name of the Lord").

Marshall's portrayals are convincing with smooth and distinct transitions from one character to another, demanding the audiences undivided attention. His command of every individual's accents and mannerisms are noteworthy. This is not surprising seeing as he has been performing the show all over America and Europe for nine years. The script is clever though a bit longwinded at times. One is able to understand his points without having to be told over and over again.

The confidence displayed on stage belongs to one who has been performing for many years and who has gained a great comfort in being so close and intimate with his audience. Marshall knows exactly what is set before him and how to tackle it with seeming ease. It is a pleasure to watch someone as passionate and self-assured do what he does and loves best.

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