

Sometimes, when a play seems to be veering off subject, it takes strong leads to reel it in and keep it on track.

Enter Hadassah R. Nelson and Andrew Cassel, who play Hermione and Leontes in Theatre UAF's production of William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale." Both actors have received serious praise from the UAF Theatre Department and the community. While other cast members seem to fumble or fade too quickly into the background, these two stand as pillars, guiding the story and leading the audience with their moving performances.

But "The Winter's Tale" is a strong effort for a student theater group. Despite being labeled as "comedy," "The Winter's Tale" is exceedingly complex. It consists of two very different acts — the first dark and brooding, full of jealousy and miscommunication, the second lighter, happier, funny and romantic.

While the first act digs deep emotionally and leaves you aching at the end, the second half has a harder time finding itself. The actors never seem to find the same emotional depth that makes the first act so riveting. There are moments of wit and tenderness that make the second act entertaining, but ultimately it is sort of dull compared to the first act.

Director Stephan Golux has cut the play from 3 1/2 to a more rea-

sonable 2 1/2 hours. The cuts work, especially during the first act, where quick changes are needed to keep the plot advancing. Yet, despite quick scene changes that give the actors no more than a breath of pause, the second act seems to crawl toward the finish.

The simple stage, designed by UAF student Rhi Johnson, consists of a few stone columns and a balcony. Though minimal, the lighting and basic props change the setting completely, and a meadow scene is fully distinguishable from the brooding, dark castle. Bethany Marx had the equally difficult task of designing costumes, and she succeeds masterfully. The second act's floral, nymph-like outfits are the highlight. They ooze with flowers and femininity, playfully embodying the Bohemian characters.

But between the beauty of the stage and costumes, some of the student actors disappear in the jumble. At times they were hard to hear. The Salisbury Theater isn't known for its acoustics, but even from the third row I strained to hear at times. When music played