



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK MUIR

BARD TO THE BONE

At last, a version of Shakespeare you can dance to. STEPHEN DUNNE previews *The Caribbean Tempest*.

One of the pleasures of Sydney in January is the al fresco entertainment. There's outdoor cinema, jazz and symphony in the Domain and Shakespeare in the Botanic Gardens.

This year's dose of the Bard is perhaps more interesting than previous seasons. Firstly, it's one of Shakespeare's best plays and farewell to the stage, *The Tempest*. And secondly, it's been given a distinct Caribbean/calypso/reggae feel.

The Caribbean Tempest has its origins in the Holders Season, an annual Barbados arts festival held in an idyllic location, the grounds of a 17th-century plantation house on the island's west coast. The play was premiered at the 1999 Holders Season with Kylie Minogue as Miranda and the Royal Shakespeare Company's David Calder as Prospero. It subsequently had a four-week run at the Edinburgh Festival.

The version we'll see in the Botanic Gardens is directed by the original director, Toby Gough, but has a local cast including Brian Green as the misanthropic Caliban and Warren Hussey as the "drunkard vaudeville clown" Trinculo.

Both reckon the Caribbean feel adds immeasurably to this magical, romantic tale of a vengeful sorcerer, Prospero, and his daughter, Miranda, marooned on a desert island.

"That kind of colourful, rhythmic feel that is indigenous to Africa now permeates the culture of the world," says Trinidad-born Green. "I mean, Shakespeare would have written it differently if he'd had access to us folks."

Green says the process of immersing himself in the role of Caliban has been a fascinating experience. "When you play a slave,

somebody who has to be subjugated and has no hope, it puts your head into a different kind of space. Our generation is about not just reconciliation, but learning to have joy together as different races."

Hussey graduated from NIDA last year and *The Caribbean Tempest* is his first professional gig. He says he's loving it, adding the actor's traditional catchphrase: "It's great to be working."

"To have that formal training and then straightaway get into a gig like this where you're working with people of such huge backgrounds – Bill [Hunter], Brooke [Satchwell], Alex [Dimitriades], Brian [Green] and Pat [Patou] – is fantastic, because straightaway you're thrown into an arena where you can learn from them as well as contributing to the whole process."

The music, an original song-based score by West Indian artists, is essential to the show. Green, who is more accustomed to singing opera, says the material has forced him to stretch his vocal technique.

"But it does allow you to interact with the audience a whole lot more directly and there's a lot of fun to be had there," he says.

Hussey remarks, "[The music is] also very accessible to the audience. Those rhythmic tones that the reggae gives off, people just naturally move to it.

"You hear it being played and suddenly you're moving with it without realising that you're getting into it, and so that just brings the audience in."

The Caribbean Tempest opens tonight and plays Tuesday to Sunday at 8pm until April 21. Tickets are priced from \$23.20 to \$42.20, family of four \$95 plus booking fee. Bookings 9266 4800.