

'Count Basil': Going Way Back

by **MATT REVILLE**
Staff Writer

Horizons Theatre's new production of "Count Basil" isn't just an entertaining evening of stagecraft. It's also a look back – way back – at theater history.

On Stage

This tragedy was written at the very end of the 18th century by Joanna Baillie. She was at the time known as England's greatest female playwright, but throughout the intervening two centuries her works have more often resonated on the printed page than on the stage. Although a few of her works made their way to the London stage, and even to America, this production marks the first time "Count Basil" has been performed.

The wait has been long, but the result is both interesting and truly entertaining. This is not just a historical relic; it is a solid piece of theater.

Set in 16th-century Italy, the plot revolves around the title character, a military commander whose dalliances with the flirtatious Princess Victoria threaten to touch off a mutiny among his men and do set off all sorts of intrigue inside the palace. Redeeming himself near the beginning of the second act, Count Basil again falls prey to Victoria's charms, with the lives of many hanging in the balance (hint: it isn't called a "tragedy" for nothing).

Director Leslie Jacobson cut



Cate Brewer, Jessica Cerullo and Caren Anton are among those starring in Horizons Theatre's "Count Basil."

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Baillie's script from the three-hour range to a taut two-hour production.

The pace is energetic, and the modest size of Arlington's Theatre on the Run works to the advantage of actors and audience alike.

The main players are uniformly above average. Eric Schoen brings a humanity to Count Basil, while Jessica Cerullo is winning as Victoria.

The supporting cast is chock full of talent: Colby Codding as Rosinberg, Basil's kin who counsels him to leave the loving behind and get back to warfare; Catherine Aselford as the duke who leads the plot against Basil; and Leigh-Erin Balmer as the kinsman who turns traitor.

And it's always a delight to watch local stage legend Caren

Anton effortlessly work her way into the intricacies a character. This time around, she's Victoria's common-sense governess.

The stage is as simple and effective as the costumes (William Pucilowsky) are sumptuous. Composer John Ward has put together a number of songs to move the plot forward.

Baillie was known in her day as "the female Shakespeare," and she pays homage to the Bard in bits and pieces throughout the script. But "Count

Basil" is an original work; you may strain a bit to follow the period language, but the plot makes itself plain soon enough.

Kudos to Horizons for dusting off a work that had never seen the light of day, and giving it life. This production may well send you to the library in search of more from Baillie.

"Count Basil" continues through June 29 at Theater on the Run, 3700 South Four Mile Run Drive in Arlington. Performances are Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 3 p.m. with a Saturday, June 28 matinee at 3 p.m.

Tickets are \$22 for adults, \$18 for students and seniors. For information, call (703) 243-8550 or see the Web site at www.horizonstheatre.org.