

The Tempest

SYNOPSIS

The Tempest

The play begins with a shipwreck in a storm. Prospero, who has caused the storm by magic, tells his daughter Miranda how they came to the island 12 years previously, after Prospero's brother, Antonio, had usurped the dukedom with the agreement of the King of Naples, Alonso. Now that Miranda is 15, Prospero has the opportunity to gain power over his enemies.

Prospero uses his magic to control a spirit called Ariel, who is normally invisible. It is Ariel who has made the storm. Prospero has also enslaved a savage creature called Caliban, the son of the witch Sycorax, who used to live on the island. Caliban first helped Prospero and was taught his language, but since attempting to rape Miranda Caliban has been a slave.

The party from the ship, who have been kept safe by Ariel, are wandering around the island separately. Alonso's son Ferdinand believes his father has been drowned. When he meets Miranda they fall in love at first sight, but Prospero sets him heavy tasks to test him.

Alonso, with his councillor Gonzalo, his brother Sebastian and Antonio, is looking for his son. Sebastian and Antonio, who make cynical fun of everything, plot to murder the King and Gonzalo.

The drunken butler Stephano and the jester Trinculo meet Caliban and give him alcohol. Caliban decides to worship them and urges them to murder Prospero.

When spirits bring a banquet to the King and his party, Ariel suddenly appears as a harpy and condemns them for what they have done to Prospero. Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio are driven into a frenzy, and the whole party then fall into a trance.

Prospero presents a masque of spirits to Ferdinand and Miranda, warning them not to have sex before marriage. At the end he remembers Caliban's conspiracy and arranges for Caliban and his friends to be hunted by spirits.

Finally, prompted by Ariel, he decides to forgive his enemies, and lifts the magic spell on them. He reunites Alonso with Ferdinand and Miranda, who is amazed to see all these new people. Miranda and Ferdinand will marry, Prospero will have his dukedom, they will all return to Naples in the miraculously preserved ship, and Prospero, fulfilling his promise, will set Ariel free, break his magic staff and drown his magic books in the sea.

Media:

DVD:

Forbidden Planet (1956), dir. Fred McLeod Wilcox (famous science fiction adaptation)

The Tempest (1979), dir. Derek Jarman

The Tempest (BBC TV Shakespeare 1980), dir. John Gorrie, with Michael Hordern

The Tempest (1982), dir. Paul Mazursky (very loose adaptation about a wealthy New Yorker who takes his daughter to a Greek island)

The Tempest (1983), dir. William Woodman, with Efrem Zimbalist (not recommended)

Prospero's Books (1991), dir. Peter Greenaway, with John Gielgud (wonderfully imaginative revisioning, with music by Michael Nyman)

The Tempest (1998), dir. Jack Bender, with Peter Fonda (based on the story and set in the American Civil War)

The Tempest (2011), dir. Julie Taymor, with Helen Mirren

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 3 (2007) *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*

Not available:

The Tempest (1960), dir. George Schaefer, with Richard Burton (VHS only)

CD Audio:

The Tempest (Naxos), with Ian McKellen

The Tempest (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

Noises, Sounds and Sweet Aires by Michael Nyman (modern British opera-ballet)

The Tempest by Thomas Adès (modern British opera)

The Tempest by Zdenek Fibich (Czech opera)

The Magic Island by William Alwyn

Incidental music by Purcell, Tchaikovsky, Sibelius

Numerous settings of the songs from the play

[Michael Mitchell]