

A modern twist on a classic Twain tale

LMC's Mendel Center to host adaptation of 'A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court'

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**

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BENTON HARBOR — In Mark Twain's 1889 novel, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," 19th-century man Hank Morgan, after a blow to the head, awakens in sixth-century England and the time of King Arthur.

Sparked by Twain's own dream in which he was a knight severely inconvenienced by the weight of his armor, the book has been seen as both a satire of romanticized ideas of chivalry, as well as a commentary on the industrialization of America.

But what if Twain's book were written for the 21st century?

That's the foundation of Jeffrey Hatcher's commissioned adaptation of "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" for The Acting Company, which performs the new touring production Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

"Twain was looking at the industrialization of America, and all the manufacturing happening with an eye of cynicism," says Ian Belknap, The Acting Company's artistic director, who also directed this production. "In a way, we live in a not dissimilar time. Obviously our advancement is surrounded by technology. In the book, Hank travels with an almanac and that's how he remembers things in the future. In Jeff's story he has an iPhone that somehow works in sixth-century Camelot."

In The Acting Company's adaptation, Hank (Andy Nogasky) awakens in Camelot where he encounters King Arthur (Adam Mondschein), Lancelot (Torsten Johnson), Guinevere (Angels Janas) and Merlin (Ian Gould), astonishing the Middle Age crowd

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Photo provided / Heidi Bohnenkamp

Andy Nogasky plays Hank and Grant Fletcher Prewitt plays Clarence in The Acting Company/Guthrie Theater production of "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court." The play will be staged Saturday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

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with heroic fireworks, modern medicine and electricity. These tricks from the future initially advance and improve King Arthur's Court but society ultimately struggles to evolve in this satirical tale.

"You've got such vivid characters that have such wonderful dimension to them. It makes it easy to have fun with it," says Grant Fletcher Prewitt, who portrays Clarence the servant in the production. "I play one of the servants who has a nice back-and-forth banter with Hank throughout the play. I'm this sidekick character that helps Hank find his way through this strange world in the past. It's very lighthearted, very goofy, and filled with Jeffrey's witticisms."

This is Hatcher's fifth project with The Acting Company, which was founded in 1972 by producer/di-

rector/actor John Houseman and its current producing director Margot Harley with members of the first graduating class of Juilliard's Drama Division. Some of his other works include "Three Viewings," "Scotland Road," "To Fool the Eye" and "The Turn of the Screw." Hatcher wrote much of "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," with input from

both Belknap and the cast. "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" was first presented in residency at Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater before beginning its national tour.

"There's no looking at the stage direction or what others did in a previous production," Belknap says. "Usually a director's job is always to follow the playwright's intention, but in something

like this, the director becomes a bridge between that process. The author's sitting right there and he's writing for the people actually in the production. Anytime a new work lives in the room, you create it together and you're all on the ground floor, which is the most exhilarating thing about working in this theater."

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