

Playing the Cardenio right

 By Eugene Yiga

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Do you trust your best friend? That's the question posed in *Cardenio*, best known as one of Shakespeare's lost plays. Written with his collaborator John Fletcher and set in 17th-century Spain, the work explores themes of friendship, family, honour, betrayal, money, power, and the true nature of love.

At the start of the play we meet Cardenio (Armand Aucamp) and Luscinda (Jenny Stead), childhood sweethearts with the desire to get married. Alas, Cardenio's best friend Fernando (Francis Chouler) has his eyes on Luscinda too, despite the fact that he's already betrothed to farm girl Dorotea (Zondwa Njokweni). What happens next? I won't say much more than that, lest I spoil the fun!

Just as mysterious as the plot is the story of [Cardenio's creation](#). Shakespeare's theatre company performed the play twice about 400 years ago, but the script was then lost. This is why there's been a lot of debate about whether Shakespeare wrote the play at all. No matter. Gregory Doran, artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, worked with Spanish playwright Antonio Álamo to create his own interpretation. The result is a work with traces of *Don Quixote* (in which the character of Cardenio is first encountered) as well as Shakespeare's [sonnets](#) and minor plays. And after being performed to critical acclaim as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's 50th anniversary celebrations in 2011, it is now being staged in South Africa for the first time.





Ensemble acting at its best

The local production is absolutely outstanding. Director Roy Sargeant has brought together a wonderful cast. The result is ensemble acting at its best. (In addition to the four leads, the cast includes Andre Jacobs as Cardenio's father, Adrian Galley as Fernando's father, Terence Bridgett as Luscinda's father, and a dozen or so other performers.) Cardenio also features costumes (Dicky Longhurst), music (Michael Tuffin), and dancing (Carolyn Holden) that authentically capture this period in time.

Just as authentic is the dialogue, which is spoken as it was back then. (Just like in *The Borgias*, everyone except the peasants speaks in an English accent.) And while a few people seated near me couldn't handle more than half an hour of Elizabethan speech - wherefore, thence, betwixt, and so on - the performances make it easy enough to understand what's going on.

Still, being a "tragicomedy", you don't quite know how it will end. "Part of the excitement in *Cardenio* is that you don't know what is going to happen next," Doran said. "You don't quite know what the tone of the piece is going to be. Sometimes it's very funny. It then leads you down a completely different path and turns into something extraordinarily tragic." I guess that means the only way to find out how things will end is to come along and discover for yourself!

Cardenio is at Cape Town's [Maynardville Open-Air Theatre](#) until 9 March. Tickets are available from [Computicket](#) or by calling +27 (0)21 421 7695. Oh, and whether you come early for a picnic in the park or arrive just in time for the show, make sure you bring a blanket and warm clothes because it gets quite chilly.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow [@eugeneyiga](#) on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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