

A "Night" to Remember: "Twelfth Night," at Iowa City's Riverside Theatre through July 9

Written by Audra Beals

Tuesday, 20 June 2006 22:44

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It's hot. It's muggy. Bugs are everywhere. And in Iowa City, that means it's time for Shakespeare.

Every summer, the Riverside Theatre trades its stage in downtown Iowa City for an outdoor venue in lower City Park, one that was actually modeled after London's Globe Theater. Appropriately enough, the company uses this Shakespeare-inspired space to stage two Shakespearean productions in repertory, and this year's schedule - running through July 9 - alternates between *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*.

Last weekend marked the start of Riverside's 2006 Shakespeare Festival with performances of *Twelfth Night*, and as a comedy, the play comes with the usual Shakespearean antics: mischievous pranks, mistaken identity to the extreme, more innuendo than you can keep track of, and awkward love triangles.

As for the plot, it begins with a shipwreck, or rather, its aftermath. Twins Viola and Sebastian

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are separated, each thinking the other has drowned. Viola comes ashore at Illyria, disguises herself as a man, and soon acts as a page for Duke Orsino. Orsino sends the suit-clad Viola to win over Countess Olivia on his behalf, but Olivia falls instead for Viola. Viola herself is in love with Orsino. And as if this weren't enough, Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby, decides to stir up some trouble - along with his mischievous (and usually drunk) friends, they convince the steward Malvolio that Olivia is in fact in love with *him*.

Essentially, the play becomes a jumble of love interests that are hopelessly mismatched, and to the credit of the actors and director Ron Clark - Riverside's co-artistic director - this is a *very* balanced cast.

Leigh Williams' Olivia starts as a stiff, no-nonsense countess and swiftly transforms into a ridiculous, love-struck fool being charmed unknowingly by a woman in disguise. She pulls off both aspects of the role without a hitch.

Malvolio experiences a similar transformation. Dennis Fox goes from a servant who is so proper and dull that he is practically transparent on-stage to a man with wild eyes, florescent-yellow stockings, and behavior that borders on full-out crazy.

Cristina Panfilio, who plays a very convincing Viola, has a more complicated role. While disguised as a man, she's not only warding off Olivia but falling for the man who is, essentially, her boss. Also, she has to convince everyone of her manliness, which leads to one of the play's most comical scenes - a duel involving two most unwilling participants. They spend more time dropping their swords, roaring in terror, rolling on the ground, and hitting the walls than they do actually clashing with their opponent.

As Sir Toby, Michael Huftile is appropriately loud and rowdy. His co-conspirators, played by Kimberly Lucius, Tim Budd, Paul Riopelle, and Scot West, are definitely entertaining as the group that can't stay out of trouble and causes most of the mayhem. However, as the play progresses, they lose their initially light-hearted, prankster air when they selfishly carry things to the extreme.

Interestingly, there's one aspect of this production that departs from a traditional presentation of the play; instead of dressing the actors in the typical Shakespearean garb, they are instead

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wearing outrageous, mismatched, incredibly bright costumes. One actor spent much of the play in a gaudy, hot-pink dress. Another had on a brown-and-red plaid suit paired with a sparkly turquoise vest. Even the ladies in waiting had bright-red stockings on beneath their maid-like dresses and aprons. One of the most unusual costumes looked like a cross between a pirate and a biker. If anything, the costumes all *match* in their mismatch, and brought a whimsical touch to the stage.

All in all, Riverside's *Twelfth Night* is a light-hearted production, and an extremely well-done one at that. Just remember to pack the bug spray.

For tickets, call (319)338-7672.