

Much Ado About Nothing

William Shakespeare

Rain or Shine

Cheltenham Everyman Theatre Studio

From 03 July 2018 to 05 July 2018

Review by Judith Wordsworth



Rain or Shine is a Gloucester-based professional touring theatre company which specialises in outdoor summer tours of classical theatre to castles, stately homes, gardens and village halls. During July and August from Devon to Northumberland, Wales to Norfolk and many points in-between they are performing an innovative production, directed by Tom Jordon, of Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*. However, until Thursday 5 July, Rain or Shine Theatre Company is indoors at Cheltenham's Everyman Theatre Studio.

Set at the end of World War I, The Great War, in the little-known Cotswold village of Messina under Governess Leonato's (Jane Lloyd) rule, her old friend Don Pedro (Anthony Young) and his Royal Flying

Corps retinue return from the fighting and are welcomed by herself, her daughter Hero (Jasmine Raymond) and her niece Beatrice (Pippa Meekings).

Jamie Littlewood gives a thoroughly accomplished performance as he multi-rolls, as many of these eight company members do, notably as Royal Flying Corps Claudio as well as Conrad and a Gloucestershire Morris dancer and he perfectly tailors his vocal dynamics to the indoor acoustics.

The horrified antics of Benedick, who is superbly played by Peter M Smith, when behind, around and up the tree overhearing Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato had the audience chuckling and laughing, especially at his very convincing owl impressions. The audience too laughed at Beatrice's chicken impressions and when she scurried and climbed through the audience.

Meekings's facial expressions, used throughout this production, add to her feisty and excellent performance giving depth and breadth to her character who has sworn off love and marriage even though attracted to Benedick, a man who constantly makes witty jokes often at the expense of his friends and who too has sworn off love and marriage.

Anthony Young gives a delightful jazzy rendition of "Sigh No More Ladies", accompanied by Jamie Littlewood on guitar and additional harmonies by Jayne Lloyd, and is hilarious as the overly loud hobby horse night watchman Verges. His co-night watchmen are splendidly played by Rob Keeves (Dogberry), who also double as the sullen and bitter troublemaker Don John, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother.

John Cooper-Evans is excellent as the priest, giving him touches of well-directed humour, so comical as Margaret, Hero's serving woman, and thoroughly convincing as Borachio, paid by Don John to trick Claudio into accusing Hero of lechery on the day of their wedding and to abandon her at the altar.

But after a drunken session, the protagonists Conrad and Borachio are caught by the night-watchmen and all is revealed and lovers are re-united, there is dancing and merriment, bickering ceases and vows taken.

The very simple set designed by R. R Keeves works well and, despite the company's vocal projection at times being a little overpowering for this venue—but would certainly enable every word and nuance Rain or Shine's tour outdoor venues—this is a well devised and entertaining production for their 20th anniversary summer tour.

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