

Lymington Press

As part of Lymington's Artisans by the River Festival, Rain or Shine Theatre Company presented *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Bath Road recreation ground on a balmy evening. In true Shakespeare fashion, this was the 15th of his 'strollers' 56-night summer tour around the country and the quirky presentation was a joy.

In this production, the play was set in the little-known Cotswold village of Messina in 1918 just after the First World War peace treaty when the British military forces are returning home. The characters of the well-known comedy adapt well to the 'modern' day setting and the talented cast brought them to life most realistically. Versatility is a must with this company with most actors taking on numerous roles. For instance, John Cooper-Evans was versatile as the quiet Margaret, a waiting gentlewoman, the bumbling Antonio, an old man, and Borachio, a ne'er do well accomplice of the baddie in the piece. The baddie in question, the sullen and bitter Don John, was ably played by Rob Keeves who as a contrast also played Dogberry, the comical constable and keeper of the peace. Jasmine Raymond was the beautiful Hero who captures the heart of the noble Claudio, heroically played by Jamie Littlewood - until their plans to marry are interrupted by the dastardly Don John.



Of course as things have it in this production, Jamie Littlewood also plays the evil Conrad another follower of Don John. Pippa Meekings was great fun as the feisty Beatrice, eager to make her way independently of any man, and Peter M. Smith with his eloquent eyes and sparkling teeth was splendid as Benedick, a Lothario who is determined never to tie himself down to one woman, until Hero and Claudio have their way..

The shorter Anthony Young was superb as Don Pedro, the noble prince of Aragon, but also doubled up as Verges, one of the riotous morris men standing head and shoulders above the others when wearing a massive horse's head and bellowing out his lines. The last but not least member of the cast was Jayne Lloyd, who produced as well as playing Leonato, the kind and capable governor of Messina and Hero's mother.

Apart from as mentioned above, members of the very energetic company played all sorts of other parts, morris dancers, men of the watch, guards and soldiers, often involving lots of running about and hiding behind trees and in small corners much to the great amusement of two young members of the audience. Tom Jordan deftly directed this happy and spirited performance, the setting by the river was idyllic, the weather stayed warm and dry - and there were no midges. An Enjoyable evening all round. A.S