

REVIEW OF "MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING" FOR DIGITAL THEATRE + DIRECTOR'S CUT BLOG

Take the combined talents of Josie Rourke, David Tennant and Catherine Tate and add to that a strong supporting cast and an impressive design team and you have the makings for a wonderful production. We are treated to the inspired location of Gibraltar in around 1982/3 and if the costumes are not enough then the synth pop and disco ambient will convince you. Michael Bruce creates period music that gave me flashbacks to childhood. Robert Jones gets to play with a huge spectrum of colours for the wardrobe since we are in the neon '80's and also designs a pop culture disco for the masked ball. The revolving pillars of Jones' set provide convenient hiding places and facilitate ease in changing time and location even when it is parts of the same room. The energy and frivolity of the play suits these design choices and Rourke's decision for location gives a needed urgency and reality to the text without evoking the atrocities of a more protracted skirmish.

Let's face it though if you have come to see "Much Ado About Nothing" what you really want is verbal fireworks. The two former Whovians do not disappoint. They are both up for the task, and although they may not have the sexual chemistry, they both deliver brilliant sparring of wits. Tennant brings a more nuanced performance to the table and shows off his impressive range handling the rhetoric in the first half of the production with the depth and danger of the second half. He also mixes in plenty of physical comedy especially in the scene where he "discovers" Beatrice is in love with him. From the moment he arrives onstage in a golf cart this officer has a lot in common with Alan Alda's Hawkeye from M*A*S*H, except his disdain for amore and a greater capacity to make a fool of himself. And from the moment that Hero is repugnantly slandered at her own wedding we begin to see a change in his demeanour that steels itself when entreated by Beatrice. This gives him the latitude to demonstrate his true mettle. From there he earns his way into her graces and culminates it with a masterpiece delivery of "Come, I will have thee" as they embark on their own nuptials. Less we think Tate lacks depth, let us remind ourselves that Beatrice was meant to "speak all mirth and no matter" and has "often dreamt of unhappiness and waked herself with laughing." Her scene of "over"hearing of Benedick's supposed love needs to be celebrated as she dangles from a painters harness above the chatty maidens sharing the news.

Adam James as Don Pedro provides the needed gravitas and at the end we are left pondering what his future will hold. Jonathan Coy gives a steady performance and calls upon the nobility and fire needed for his role as Leonato. We are treated to the professional debut of Tom Bateman who fleshes out his Claudio with pain and motivates his slander from a semi-drunken stupor. Sarah Macrae helps us believe in the depth of their love when she accepts Claudio back in a scene that always makes me question why. Through a haze of cigarette smoke and hen/ stag night excesses we see the seeds of Don John's (Elliot Levey) contempt. Dogberry, enacted by John Ramm, and his band of fools fits in with this world in part because of Tennant's versatility in setting up the ridiculous humour. Natalie Thomas as Margaret proves quite capable in her scenes with Hero and Benedick. Alex Beckett shows the despicableness of Borachio and at the end contriteness. Another deft move of Rourke is bringing in Leonato's wife, Innogen (played admirably by Anna Farnworth), who is referenced in the First Folio, but never materializes.

This production of "Much Ado About Nothing" is vivacious and confident. The actor's make bold choices and follow through with them. You will enjoy the time immersing yourself in the richness of the language and free flowing era whether you are a Shakespeare addict or just testing the waters of this genre. Particularly in the barbs the actors show their ability to turn a phrase on the caesura at will. There is no such thing as a perfect production, but any faults here can be shared with Mr Shakespeare himself and are few and far between. Allow yourself to engage with this sumptuous production and you won't begrudge the time spent.

-Mark Modzelewski

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Torchlight Collective is a theatre company that strives to Reveal Light, Instil Hope and Renew Discourse. Theatre should get people talking about how, as individuals, we can revitalize ourselves and the world around us.