

Theatre Review: Wonderful Trouble on Dibble Street

BY PATRICK LANGSTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN JULY 16, 2010



Trouble on Dibble Street: Mo Bock, Rose Napoli, Brent Buchanan and Michael MacDonald

Photograph by: Lynne Chagnon, .

If you're throwing a birthday party anyway, you may as well invite one of William Shakespeare's great party animals.

Prescott, perched on the edge of the St. Lawrence River about an hour south of Ottawa, turns 200 this year. By way of celebration, the town's St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival has recruited the tavern- and wench-loving Sir John Falstaff, along with the rest of the gang from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, to kick up their heels in a new, madcap comedy called *Trouble on Dibble Street*.

The show, which playwright John Lazarus has based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, is presented in Prescott's outdoor amphitheatre overlooking the river.

Shakespeare's original isn't one of his best. It was reportedly dashed off in a couple of weeks to please Queen Elizabeth I and suffers from haste. Lazarus has resolved the weaknesses by keeping the original storyline but rewriting the text and setting the action in Prescott in 1910.

But whether the context is Elizabethan or small-town Ontario, the plot and characters are universal.

Falstaff — who first appeared, larger than life, in Shakespeare's Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2 but needs a more boisterous portrayal here by actor Mo Bock — is low on cash. Hoping to wend his way to their husbands' money, he decides to bed a couple of married ladies: the spirited townswoman Alice Ford (Alix Sideris) and her spunky, farm-wife friend Meg Page (Colleen Winton). Faithful to their husbands, the two lead the self-deluded Falstaff on a merry chase that ends in both public humiliation and community acceptance of the arrogant old reprobate.

A sub-plot about a very different kind of love finds Meg's daughter Anne (Melissa Morris) stepping out with the impecunious farm boy Nicholas Fenton (Warren Bain). Anne's parents want her to marry either the mercurial French-Canadian Dr. Caillou (Kris Joseph) or the recent Upper Canada College graduate Abraham Slender (the very funny Ron Klappholz), both of them gay. Not surprisingly, all ends well in the world of young romance.

Dr. Caillou's nurse Mrs. Quickly is played by the outstanding Kerry Ann Doherty as a clodhopper with an unexpectedly sly mind and good heart. Falstaff's dim-witted minions Bardolph and Pistol get energetic performances by, respectively, Michael MacDonald and Brent Buchanan. Other cast members include Pierre Brault, soldiering admirably through what sounded like a devil of a cold on Thursday night, as Alice Ford's suspicious husband Frank.

Shepherded along with energy and good humour by director Craig Walker, the play underscores traditional values of community and family with a light touch that's especially appropriate for summer theatre. Musical interludes and local references to Prescott and area abound. Playwright Lazarus also pays tribute to Shakespeare by slipping in lines from, among others, A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Prescott's amphitheatre is a lovely setting, but not every actor's voice carries well, so sit close to the stage. Bring a lawn chair or cushion; the amphitheatre's rock seating is hard (if you forget, chairs and cushions can be rented on-site). And don't forget the bug spray; the mosquitoes descend like clockwork just as the show is winding down.

Trouble on Dibble Street alternates with the festival's other production, Macbeth, until Aug. 14. 613-925-5788, www.stlawrenceshakespeare.ca

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