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North Country Public Radio

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL is an interesting choice for a summer season. Darker and not as well known as Shakespeare's other comedies, it has an acid probing tone, is filled with suspect idealisms and ambiguous redemptions, and in the final moments of the play seems to look ironically at its own title in a scene of sudden and unreal forgiveness. Love, or at least blinkered romantic obsession, carries the day.

With the action taking place primarily in France, the play is set in front of colorful panels designed by Andrea Robertson, who's also responsible for the excellent costumes. I especially liked LaFew's elegant kerchief and the lovely drape of the back of Helena's dress.

Parolles whose very name means words, entertainingly played by Marc Bondy, is the embodiment of the idea that both clothes and words can conceal rather than reveal and that words can substitute for deeds. His final speech to the audience is one of the evening's more powerful moments. In another instance of using language to deceive, the interpreter scenes are very entertaining, as is the Interpreter himself, Bruce Beaton.

Speaking of language, Daniel Giverin, who makes a wonderfully stuffy Lord LaFew, has one of those brilliant Shakespearean lines that leap out of the text. During the final scene of forgiveness he turns away to wipe his eyes and says, "My eyes smell onions." The accomplished Mr. Giverin even plays the flute in the closing song with "attitude."

Quincy Armorer is very effective as 1st Lord Dumaine, as are Kerry Ann Doherty as an Italian widow and Melissa Morris as her virtuous daughter Diana. Janet Martin is excellent as the Countess and handles the complex language with ease.

Warren Bain has the unenviable task of playing Shakespeare's most unpleasant romantic lead. The Countess's son Bertram is a selfish snob who's not only a liar but a whiner. Mr. Bain does a good job, which lets us see that rather than being truly in love with him, Elena Juatco's Helena has a passion for ignorance and is in love with the appearance, not the reality. Is she unable to see or unwilling to look? Neither character is able to perceive the other's true nature.

One thing I enjoy about Director Janet Irwin's work is her incorporation of music into the production. Act I opens with a French song and Act II, of course, with one in Italian. She and Music Director Melissa Morris also find interesting moments to use single musicians onstage – in this case a harpist and a very good clarinetist. Miss Irwin's staging is fine and takes advantage of the theatre's stairs and entrances. As for the play, Miss Irwin brings out its humor, but never shies away from its ambiguity.

This is a good opportunity to see one of Shakespeare's less well-known comedies. As always, it's a lovely setting and Shakespeare outdoors in daylight has an air of authenticity. Besides, there's the river, the birds, the ice cream – what can I say?

On a scale of one to five the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival production of ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL gets four and one fourth buoys. For North Country Public Radio I'm Connie Meng.