

Love and mayhem on the St. Lawrence

BY PATRICK LANGSTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN JULY 20, 2011 12:08 PM



Elena Juatco as Viola and Quincy Armorer as Orsino in Twelfth Night at the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival in Prescott.

Photograph by: Lynne Chagnon, The Ottawa Citizen

TWELFTH NIGHT

St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival

Kinsmen Amphitheatre on Water Street West, Prescott

Reviewed Tuesday, July 19

OTTAWA — A play about the outcome of a shipwreck performed in an outdoor theatre where boats bob in the background — how perfect is that?

Shakespeare's comedy Twelfth Night tells the story of Viola, a young woman cast up on the shores of a strange country called Illyria after her ship goes down in a storm. St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival's production of the play takes place in an amphitheatre in Prescott, overlooking the St. Lawrence River and the town's marina.

There were no shipwrecks Tuesday night, but the setting was a bonus to this delightful production of Shakespeare's ever-fresh tale of young love, disguise, and the teeter-totter of joy and sadness, hope and despair that defines not just new love but pretty much all of life.

The plot, naturally, is too convoluted to summarize in detail. Suffice to say that Viola (the excellently nuanced Elena Juatco), believing her twin brother Sebastian has drowned in the shipwreck, disguises herself as a young man named Cesario and enters the service of Orsino (Quincy Armorer), the Duke of Illyria. She falls in love with him, he's in love with the Countess Olivia (Kerry Ann Doherty), and Olivia falls for Cesario.

Meanwhile, a sub-plot so vital that it regularly threatens to overwhelm the main storyline, thunders along. It too involves love and mayhem, though with characters like the dipsomaniac Sir Toby Belch (Bruce Beaton), his astoundingly dim pal Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Warren Bain in yellow-checked trousers that would embarrass a used-car salesman), and the mischievous waiting woman Maria (Janet Martin), it's mayhem of a whole other dimension.

Ian Farthing, the festival's artistic director, plays Malvolio, Olivia's Puritan steward. Looking like he needs a case of Tums to put things right in his universe, this finely conceived and executed Malvolio gets his comeuppance at the hands of Belch and company. In keeping with the mix of fun and melancholy that's central to the show, however, it's a comeuppance that makes you sorry — at least briefly — for Malvolio, who looks so alone that you almost want to give him a hug.

Director Craig Walker has set Illyria in British-ruled Ireland some time after the 1798 rebellion against the British overlords. Orsino and his household are British and Olivia's household Irish (accents are sometimes dicey). The gulf between British overlords and their Irish subjects, however, is more footnote than main text in the production, another element of the theme of bifurcation that this production uses to good effect.

In keeping with the topsy-turvy world of Illyria/Ireland/Prescott, Viola/Cesario and Sebastian (Aldrin Bundoc), whose eventual re-appearance adds to the confused merriment, are Canadian.

Music being the food of love in Twelfth Night, song holds a key place in this production. With performers playing harp, violin and more, the Celtic songs — a couple of them gorgeously performed — range from the traditional She Moves Through the Fair to Steve Earle's barn burner The Galway Girl.

Celtic music often seems to hold the patent on how to mix joy and melancholy. That's the case here, with Brent Buchanan as Feste the Fool serenading Malvolio at the play's end with an especially measured Hey Ho, the Wind and Rain.

The St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival includes a production of All's Well That Ends Well running on alternate nights.

Bring a lawn chair or cushion when you go and insect repellent: at 2 hours, Twelfth Night is winding down just as the mosquitoes are winding up.

Twelfth Night and All's Well that Ends Well continue until Aug. 13. Tickets and information: 613-925-5788 or visit stlawrenceshakespeare.ca.

Another Twelfth Night: Read Jamie Portman's review of the Stratford Festival's production of Twelfth Night on page E6

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