

North Country Public Radio
Connie Meng
August 8, 2011

An entertaining production of TWELFTH NIGHT, one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies, is currently running at the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival. This tale of shipwreck, mistaken identity, obsessive love and drunken pranks is fun to watch, partly because the actors seem to be enjoying themselves as well.

Bruce Beaton gives a lively performance as the unrepentant drunkard Sir Toby Belch. As Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Warren Bain is saddled with an almost impenetrable Scots accent, but his body language is so funny it doesn't matter. I loved his attempt to spit. Brent Buchanan makes an appealing Feste and is especially effective in the final song.

Marc Bondy, one of the company's strongest actors, is excellent as Antonio. In spite of his accent, every word is both clear and believable. The versatile Daniel Giverin is not only an excellent violinist, but makes a very funny something out of nothing as the Act II Priest.

I have never thought of Olivia and Orsino as comic characters, but in this production they become so and it works. Quincy Armorer's Orsino has just the right touch of self indulgent pomposity, while Kerry Ann Doherty's Olivia descends believably into dithering. They both love being in love, and I've always felt they deserve each other, instead of finding happy endings with their respective twins.

There's a lot more to Ian Farthing's Malvolio than a pompous fool, and he's quite touching with his wondering joy in the fake letter. His attempts to smile and exaggeratedly prissy running are very funny. This three-dimensional Malvolio provides a moving ending to this production.

Andrea Robertson's costumes are very well done. I especially admired Malvolio's dressing gown, complete with night cap and matching slippers and Olivia's lovely gown in Act II. As for the music, Melissa Morris has done her usual fine job. The setting of "Come Away, Death" including her duet with Viola is particularly appealing, and I liked the simple power of the final song.

Craig Walker has done a nice job of staging and directing the play, however I question the use of dialects. For me they don't make dramatic sense and obscure the often difficult language of the play. The Irish music is sufficient to establish the locale. On the other hand, Mr. Walker has staged an inventive and entertaining shipwreck with a wonderful reveal. He's also found a clever way to deal with Malvolio's prison scene with Sir Topaz. I also enjoyed his unusual take on Orsino and especially Olivia.

There's only a week left in the run, so take this opportunity to get to Prescott and spend a couple of entertaining hours by the river.

On a scale of one to five the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival production of TWELFTH NIGHT gets four and two thirds buoys. For North Country Public Radio I'm Connie Meng.