

Twelfth Night

Written by William Shakespeare

Performed by The Bampton Players

On Saturday 13th July 2024 in the grounds of Sherwood, Bampton

Directed by Avril Saxby

Music by Hugh Saxby

A gentle breeze blew over the garden of Sherwood as the audience took their seats. The staging was raised with two further raised areas either side of the stage. One with a chaise longue representing the court of Orsino, Duke of Illyria and the other an opulent chair depicting the house of Olivia, countess and Orsino's hearts-desire.

The play is preceded by Hugh Saxby teaching the audience an originally written four-line verse;

'Hold thy piece. Prithee hold thy peace. Oh, thy knave. Prithee hold thy peace', which the audience learned, so as to be able to join the company in singing, later in the production.

Jaunty music and the sound of sea-waves crashing brought the play to life as did the use of cloths to represent sea waves moved by actors. Viola/Cesario is shipwrecked, as is her twin brother, Sebastian, both thinking the other has perished. Viola was played by a strong actor, who was confident with her lines and portrayed the two characters (Cesario) well. Sebastian, a gender swap role, was equally as clear with her diction and worked well with her compadre, Antonio. For an actor who is new to the society, Antonio was performed with flare and assurance in the role and the script. A natural actor.

The Duke, Orsino, also a new actor to the society, is perfectly confused with his unusual feelings for Cesario and acts this uncomfortable attraction well. Olivia looked the part of a countess in her self-indulgent melancholy with a subtle change when she encounters Cesario, keeping her poise when struggling to control her passion, which the director felt was right for the character.

Sir Toby Belch with a huge paunch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek were a great duo. Sir Toby inebriated and meddlesome and Sir Andrew, another gender role swap, pleasantly oblivious of everything and timid when asked to duel. These two complimented each other as did Maria and Feste.

Maria, a gentlewoman and a servant, is not afraid to speak her mind and gently manipulates Olivia, Sir Toby and Malvolio. This actor gave us a comedic, dry yet naughty Maria and acted it very well indeed. As did Feste, the clown/fool who moves from once house to the other, offering his advice yet acting the fool. This Feste not only acted this role brilliantly, he sang the songs written by Hugh Saxby throughout the performance. He also learned to play the guitar especially to play this part.

Poor Malvolio, *'dry and sick with self-love'*, is a complex character, beautifully depicted by this actor. Poorly treated and manipulated by Maria and Sir Toby, he personified the priggish servant and his eventual fall from grace. The scene in Act 4 when he was confined to a dark room, protesting he is not mad, was superbly acted.

The music was such a wonderful addition to the play, and felt like it had been composed by Thomas Morley, himself. Songs and incidental music of the time and just lovely melodies, a great achievement indeed.

Admirably acted cameo roles such as the sea captain, Valentine and the Courtier along with a controlled performance from the actor playing the priest supported this production with some doubling up as the officers too.

As the sun began setting the lighting came into its own and the design produced a lovely bright stage along with the sound being clear, especially during the underscoring during dialogue and the songs. All of the cast projected their voices well and could be heard clearly, throughout.

The wardrobe team had a challenge and rose to it. The sea captain in his silver shirt, silver blue shorts and hat, Orsino's red hose, red jerkin, ruff, black feathered cap, Andrew Aguecheek's yellow and green striped long tunic, ruff and yellow feathered cap, Olivia's blue silk gown, veil and silver heart necklace to mention a few. The rest of the cast were dressed well, of the time with both Olivia and Valentine in identical purple velvet hose, purple flowing doublet, purple hat with blue feather.

As one of my favourite works by William Shakespeare, my husband and I thoroughly enjoyed this production, from the talented cast and with the added unique music by Hugh Saxby . Well done to all and especially the director, Avril Saxby.

Thank you, once again, for the famous Bampton Player's welcome my husband and I received from you all and I look forward to your next production.

Lyn Burgoyne (Noda Representative, District 5, East and Mid Devon)