

Good Reason For Much Ado About “Nothing”



By James Scarborough

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Even the morning after seeing William Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing," directed by Helen Borgers for the Long Beach Shakespeare Company, the memory of Benny Briseno's Benedick, a young Lord of Padua love-dueling with Erica Simms's Beatrice, the niece of Leonato, the governor of Messina, makes me wonder if I was dreaming.

They so perfectly nailed the roles of a Why-do-I-insult-you-so-much? Because-I-love-you couple, you might as well cancel all future auditions for the two roles: this one's it.

For those who seek a modern-day context for this Shakespearean love story, consider this pairing as the sort of thing you'd find in the Missed Connections section of Craig's List:

"Yesterday afternoon at the fishmonger in Padua. You with the honey blonde hair, the willowy carriage, the wicked sense of humor. Me with the cavalier mustache, the suddenly-deflated ego, and an inability to form a coherent sentence. We bickered, thrust and parried, paused to catch our breath, and resumed anew. You tarried away when your Uncle the Governor called and the moon fell out of my sky."

Their exchanges were pitch-perfect, breathless and lapidary. And the most amazing thing of all is, they didn't even steal the show.

Everything in this exceptionally well-cast show was exquisite. Under Borgers' allegro direction, the show was fast-paced and witty, spot-on and exhilarating. The Bard's bejeweled dialogue was polished to a keen shine, the choreography was a paragon of terpsichorean splendor. The audience would erupt into applause even after brief scenes, so well were said scenes enacted. The story unfolded effortlessly, to countless rounds of laughter that ran the gamut from chortles to guffaws.

Set in Messina, Italy, the story recounts what happens when Don Pedro (Maurice Shaw), Prince of Aragon, returns home after quelling a civil war led by his bastard (both definitions apply here) brother, Don John (Lawrence Tunson).

This being Shakespeare, if the story's not about war then it's about love, though both Shakespearean war and love involve the same tactics of feign, illusion, counterattack and all out storming.

The offices of Messina's Governor are lousy with love. Claudio of Florence (Kevin Williams) one of Don Pedro's stalwart soldiers, is smitten with Hero (Nasi Nassiri), the Governor's daughter. And, though evidence suggests otherwise, Benedick is taken with Beatrice.

Deceit, trickery, masks, eloquence-to-die-for, wooing, the wobbly knees of love, the fluttery tummy of infatuation, seemingly hopeless complications, magnificent wordplay — they're all here, as well as a story line that weaves these tangled threads into a shimmering tapestry of romance. Not to mention a couple of songs, an opening theme and dance music that might sound downright 17th Century but were actually composed by our own Edmund Velasco.

You should see the show once to become enchanted, a second time to pick up all you missed the first time, and a third time to confirm it wasn't an end-of-summer dream.

Performances are at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday. The show runs until Oct. 24.

Tickets are \$20. The Richard Goad Theatre is located at 4250 Atlantic Ave. For more information, call 997-1494 or visit www.lbshakespeare.org.