

Entertainment

Play review: 'Twelfth Night' at Boscobel in Garrison Shakespeare comedy is infused with music, colorful costumes

By James F. Cotter

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GARRISON — "If music be the food of love, play on!"

So begins Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" as Duke Orsino craves to win the lady Olivia's love. She refuses to see him on the grounds that she still mourns the death of her brother.

Viola also believes that she has lost her twin brother, Sebastian, in a shipwreck. Disguised as Cesario, she becomes Orsino's page as he continues to woo Olivia. Viola soon falls in love with Orsino, and Olivia in turn is enamored of Cesario, thinking she is a man, so matters grow more discordant until twin Sebastian shows up and harmony is restored at the end. Another plot unfolds in the meantime when the proud and puritanical Malvolio, Olivia's steward, is gulled by the maid Maria, guzzling Sir Toby Belch and the fool Feste into thinking that Olivia really loves him as long as he dresses and behaves like a high-fashion lover, cross-gartered and in yellow stockings, the last thing Olivia needs. His comeuppance results in his being bound and blindfolded as a madman. At the close, in a scene of reconciliations, his unforgiving anger leaves an ominous note that sounds in many of the Bard's later darker plays.

The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival is offering a colorful, comical and thoughtful revival of this classic comedy. Under the tent at Boscobel, the world of Illyria whirls into life, with strolling folk musicians, strutting knights and pursuing lovers.

Twelfth Night was a Feast of Fools with a Lord of Misrule presiding. Here the clown Feste sings and leads the dances in a celebration of the folly of love, ambition, drinking and carousing. Only with the closing ballad does Feste remind the audience that "the wind and the rain" will sweep our illusions away when "our play is done."

Feste is played by Maia Guest as a commedia dell'arte clown with whiteface, red hair and straw hat, full of mischievousness and witty repartee. She sings the songs with humor, ardor or sadness as the changing moods of her masters demand. She is wise where they are foolish, truthful where they are deceived.

Michael Borrelli's Orsino is full of himself, expecting to have his own way in love and Illyria, but he is an inept ruler who neglects his subjects and their true natures. Gabra Zackman's Olivia appears to know how to run her household, but her maid, steward and uncle have their own plans, as she becomes obsessed with winning Cesario.

Katie Hartke's Viola/Cesario, on the other hand, is smart enough to read the real situation but cannot control it. She expresses her ardor and frustrations with admirable delivery. Max Polski as Sebastian has a series of surprises when he is mistaken for Cesario and he handles them with wide-eyed wonder. Imagine being wooed and wed on the same day!

As Malvolio, Wesley Mann holds forth with conviction as a righteous critic of bad behavior and then as a persecuted victim of a vicious plot to disgrace him. Richard Ercole never lets up in his pursuit of dissipation as Sir Toby, and, as his dupe, the nitwit knight Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Paul Bates is equally hilarious when he echoes Toby and boasts of his nonexistent valor. As Maria, Eleanor Handley is clear-voiced and vivacious, obviously enjoying every minute of her plot to unmask Malvolio.

The rest of the cast is remarkable in its timing, movement and faithfulness to the poetry and drama. In the spirit of the play, several roles of men as sea-captains are given to women, and the part of Fabian, a member of Olivia's household, is absorbed by a female Feste.

This classy production is directed by John Christian Plummer with imaginative twists and turns that keep actors on their toes and speaking trippingly on the tongue throughout. The costume designs by Charlotte Palmer-Lane dazzle with originality and color contrasts. The music written by Raymond Bokhour has a distinctive American flavor of blues, gospel, hoedown and ballads that enhances the Bard's lyrics in which music is the food of love.

IF YOU GO ...

What: "Twelfth Night" by Shakespeare

Where: Boscobel, 1601 Route 9D, Garrison

When: 7 p.m. July 8, 9, 15, 17, 24, 29, 30; 8 p.m. July 4, 11, 12; 6 p.m. July 6, 20; additional performances in August

Tickets: \$28-\$44

Call: 265-9575