

Theater Review: Much Ado About Nothing

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October 17, 2022

by Beki Pineda

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING – Written by William Shakespeare: Directed by Chris Coleman. Produced by the Denver Center Theatre Company (14th and Curtis, Denver) **through November 6**. Tickets available at 303-893-4100 or denvercenter.org.

Whoever thought Shakespeare didn't have a sense of humor never saw MUCH ADO. Humor is rife throughout the Bard's offerings – even those designated as tragedies. MACBETH, HAMLET, even ROMEO AND JULIET all have comic relief characters that lighten the mood. This specific production at the Denver Center is one of the funniest I've seen – even besting the Emma Thompson/Kenneth Branagh movie version a few years ago.

While everyone in the cast fills their roles with gusto, there is no doubt that the heroes in this production are Geoffrey Kent and Dana Green who bring the independent and repressed Benedict and Beatrice to life. The suppression of their obvious (to everyone but themselves) attraction to each other becomes the source of snarky remarks and wholehearted insults. It's only by the machinations of their friends and family that the romance begins to blossom. The vulnerability and hesitancy shown by these characters as written by Shakespeare and created by these actors brought delight to the audience. The people watching the show burst into spontaneous applause often to show their approval of the choices made by the characters as well as the actors playing them.

Geoffrey looks like he's straight out of the 1930's with his wide-legged high waisted trousers and his 20's curly cut. Dana has the slouch and the attitude of a young Katherine Hepburn. Together they are like electricity. Their ease at breaking the fourth wall and involving the audience in their mutual dilemmas was a stroke of genius, adding the audience member's surprising reactions to the humor. By sharing the original ire and sarcasm with the audience adds to the enjoyment of their surprising surrender and the later sweeter emotions.

Earning kudos as a second banana, Rob Nagle as the beleaguered Dogberry wows and fills the latter half of the show with satisfying laughs as he insists that he "is an ass!" He and his crew of watchmen work together to lighten the devious plot against Hero (Jennifer Paredes) by finding the villains in spite of themselves.

The cast of Denver favorites (Kate Gleason, Logan Ernstthal, Rodney Lizcano, Jihad Milhem and Gareth Saxe) and artists from across the country work together in such a positive productive way, the story becomes breezy and light-hearted in spite of the darker tones.

The secondary love story between Hero and Claudio (Gerrard James) moves swiftly forward from ecstasy to agony and back again. This love fest gives everyone on stage the opportunity to gently flirt with one another. Gavin Hoffman as Don John, Jihad Milhem as Borachio and Logan Ernstthal as Conrad make formidable villains. Gareth Saxe and Rodney Lizcano are the puzzled elders who can't quite understand what happened to the happy time they had going.

The set designed by Klara Zieglerova is a breathtakingly beautiful explosion of colorful flowers everywhere, creating a happy place that brings a smile even before the show starts. The production is also enhanced by original music by Tom Hagerman celebrating the festivities and adding opportunities to integrate dancing into the production.

If you think you don't like Shakespeare because you can't follow the language, this is the production for you. The cast brings clarity to the production with diction, intent, pause, emphasis, movement and non-written verbal responses. As a listener and watcher, you are never confused with the story line and the changes in the characters. Good work, Mr. Coleman.

A WOW factor of 9.5!!