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Philly Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night': Quick, sparkling, smiling

Updated: APRIL 19, 2016 — 4:28 PM EDT



Left to right: Michael Gamache (Fabian), Annabel Capper (Ensemble), Adam Kampouris (Feste), John Zak (Sir Andrew Aguecheek), William LeDent (Sir Toby Belch), and Jenna Kuerzi (Maria) in the Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre production of "Twelfth Night." Photo: Kendall Whitehouse.

by **Hugh Hunter**, STAFF WRITER

The Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre is now running a sparkling, fast-paced revival of *Twelfth Night*. With stunning brilliance, Shakespeare turns the farce staple of mistaken identity into a huge metaphor for human frailty.

Director Carmen Khan immediately grabs your attention. Her stage is like a ship deck with its burnished woods, rear railing, and changeable, luminous sky (thanks to set designer Bethanie Wampol). The sound of waves and swirling seagulls (thanks to composer and sound designer Fabian Obispo) complete the image.

While the story begins with a shipwreck, Khan's staging conveys a larger sense of lostness - hauntingly apt for *Twelfth Night*, since, with the exception of Feste, every character is out to sea in some sense.

At first you hope Viola (fetching Julia Jensen Ray) will emerge as the comic heroine of the piece, like Rosalind in *As You Like It*. But you neither forgive nor understand how Viola can stay in love with self-adoring Orsino (Deaon Griffin-Pressley). Women "lack retention," he tells us.

Dressed as the boy Cesario, Viola unwittingly describes speaks for all when she says, "I am not what I am." Her love rival, Olivia (Elise Hudson), is finely imperious, but in love, Olivia, too, is slave to caprice. (The play's subtitle, after all, is "What You Will.")

Those who are not romantic fools are either rogues or dupes. Khan's inventive cast, together with imaginative costume design (Vickie Esposito) and choreography (Colleen Hughes), bring to life a spectacle of zaniness.

Timorous Sir Andrew (John Zak) so resembles old Stan Laurel you want to hug him. The hilarious (and cruel) practical joke played on Malvolio (Rob Kahn) threatens to steal the show.

Shakespeare's true voice is Feste (young and acrobatic Adam Kampouris). In the original script Feste is an old, uncontrollable court jester who intrudes at will. When he plays mandolin and sadly sings "What is love," we know Feste laments the foolishness all around him.

And when he sings the melancholy finale, "When that I was and a little tiny boy," Feste is often portrayed as a world-weary Falstaff. But Khan saves gloom for the problem plays. Here, everyone jumps up to sing and dance. Even sourpuss Malvolio pops by, so you get to go home with a smile on your face.

"Twelfth Night" runs in repertory with "Macbeth" through May 22 at The Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre, 2111 Sansom St. Tickets: \$20-40. Information: 215-496-8001 or PhillyShakespeare.org.



Published: April 19, 2016 — 4:28 PM EDT **The Philadelphia Inquirer**

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