



CAPE COD TIMES

ELEMENTS THEATRE SHINES IN 'TWELFTH NIGHT'

By Cindy Nickerson, *Cape Cod Times*

Illyria rhymes with “deliria.” Was Shakespeare possibly thinking just that when he set his early comedy “Twelfth Night” (usually dated from 1601 or 1602) in this quasi mythical Mediterranean land? According to Webster’s, the word “delirium” has been around since 1590-1600, when it meant “out of one’s mind.”

Delusions of love and grandeur fuel this perennial favorite, which – under the direction of Danielle Dwyer – careens along merrily in a production by Elements Theatre Company.

Duke Orsino (Luke Norman) sets off a spinning circle of love as he obsessively pines away for the beautiful Countess Olivia (Ellen Ortolani). She, in mourning for her brother, will have no suitors. Meanwhile, a young woman named Viola (Rachel McKendree), shipwrecked off the Illyrian coast, disguises herself as a man and finds a position as a page in the duke’s household. He, knowing her as Cesario, quickly embraces her as his confidant and sends her to woo Olivia on his behalf. Eloquent in her cause – though she’s fallen in love with the duke herself – Viola only succeeds in kindling the misguided lady’s passion for her alter ego.

Olivia’s uncle, Sir Toby (Brad Lussier), exemplifies the play’s slightly off-kilter spirit. Although perpetually tipsy, he’s the mastermind behind a zany subplot or two, including a ruse to deflate Olivia’s self-important steward, Malvolio. His gleeful co-conspirators are Olivia’s gentlewoman Maria (Kate Shannon); his dim-witted comrade, Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Kyle Norman); and Feste (Chris Kanaga), Olivia’s not-so-foolish fool. They’re a rowdy, irreverent bunch with a most engaging chemistry – ignited, in large measure, by Lussier. He so completely inhabits Sir Toby – or perhaps it’s vice versa – that it’s impossible to tell where one begins and the other ends. (He clearly also played a helpful role as dramaturge. This classically trained company delivers lines with ease, taking mastery of the archaic language as if it’s second nature.)

But the entire cast is exceptional, with those playing secondary or even tertiary characters maintaining a lively presence. Particularly outstanding is Dwyer, who – in an unusual gender-bender – boldly takes on the role of Malvolio. She endows him with a pomposity equal only to the silliness that ensues when – thanks to a forged love letter, presumably from Olivia – he

begins going about wearing a forced smile and yellow stockings. After reading the letter he pronounces, "I am happy" with a fierce determination, as if to say, "even if it kills me." This casting is a nice touch in a play where the script already calls for a woman to play a man (although in Shakespeare's day, it would have been a man playing a woman playing a man). McKendree conveys great sincerity and spirit as Viola/Cesario, never losing sight of her double role. Ortolani is especially wonderful – absolutely effervescent as Olivia, who quickly trades in her black mourning weeds for shimmering dresses after meeting Cesario.

Today, we might bill "Twelfth Night" as a sunny romantic comedy. The production is very "now," tapping into the timelessness of Shakespeare's humor and humanity as it moves along at a breezy pace.

One of the famous lines from "Twelfth Night" is: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them." At the very least, Elements Theatre Company's production flirts with greatness. And it definitely delivers on the promise of great entertainment.

The Barnstable Patriot

A CHANCE FOR EVERYONE TO BRING THE BARD TO LIFE A CHANCE TO PERFORM YOUR FAVORITE SONNET

Written by John Watters, *Barnstable Patriot*



WORD
MADE
FLESH
SHAKESPEARE'S
SONNETS
CELEBRATED BY THE
SEVEN AGES OF MAN

There are few people in history who have a worldwide celebration of the 450th anniversary of their birthday, but then there are only a few that have the name recognition of the literary legend William Shakespeare. (A recent survey put the Bard, in with Lincoln, Napoleon, Mohammed and Jesus Christ as the most historically recognized names globally.)

In honor of Shakespeare, who quilled his words to parchment in the 16th and 17th century, the Elements Theatre Company of the Community of Jesus has started the Word Made Flesh project, which will allow you and participants from all around the world to use 21st century technology to tape performances of any one of his 154 sonnets. How amused and amazed would the Bard be that people are making sonnet “selfies”? It does bring another meaning to his words that “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.”

“It’s hard to remember exactly how The Word to Flesh Project got started,” said Sr. Danielle Dwyer, artistic director of Elements. “Once the idea began to formulate, you kind of forget whose original idea it was. We just saw it as a practical and fun way to put Shakespeare’s words into the hands of the people. By having people from all over do it, it sort of becomes a quilt of words if you will.”

“We have people six years old to age 94 sign up to participate,” added Dwyer.

If you would like to participate you just need to go to wordmadefleshshakespeare.org. There you peruse the list of sonnets pick one you might like to do (I picked Sonnet 139). You familiarize yourself with it, and then with whatever method you wish to record it, such as phone, iPad or video camera, you submit it to the project so even you can be a player on the stage.

As you read this, Elements Theatre Company is in New York performing an original work titled *Labyrinth: A Legacy of Language*, exploring Shakespeare's influence on other playwrights through the ages. The works of Richard Sheridan, Henrik Ibsen and Tom Stoppard are woven together with Shakespeare to create this new work.

Don't fret if you didn't get a chance to catch Elements performances in NYC, they are bringing the play home and will perform it at the Community of Jesus' Paraclete House theater on April 25 and 26.

So for those of you who would like to brush up your Shakespeare and dip your toe into performing a Sonnet in the safety of your own home, visit the Word Made Flesh website, and join in; its easy and fun.