

Society: APS: Amateur Players of Sherborne

Venue: Paddock Garden

Production: Shakespeare In (and Out of) Love

Author: John Crabtree & Martin Williams

Director: Martin Williams

Musical Director: David Grierson

Date seen: Monday 24th February 2020

SHOW REPORT

The Amateur Players of Sherborne once again create something fresh and energetic, weaving together extracts of Shakespeare's work into a cohesive programme of views of love and relationships. Striking costumes (Helen Smith), a classical backdrop, late summer gardens and a fresh August day, intermingled with live harpsichord music (David Grierson) and a sprinkling of sonnets and song, all add authenticity and atmosphere.

A series of short extracts is focused on the lovers, and full credit goes to APS for providing its latest influx of young actors with the opportunity to try their wings: speaking Shakespeare's text; experimenting with cross-dressing and gender; exploring the performance space; strong interaction between characters; all these factors ensure the first half is brimming with new talent and the promise of better yet to come. Word-perfect, well-spoken and mostly audible (even on a windy day) the younger members of the cast prove themselves worthy apprentices of the Players.

The second half features longer excerpts from 'Twelfth Night' and 'Much Ado About Nothing'. Highly enjoyable, these mini-plays showcase gifted and talented performers from APS, drawing the audience into the plot by developing the full meaning, exploring the character and demonstrating the capacity of Shakespearean actors to play with humour and a sense of mischief.

Every ounce of comedy is discovered in the characters and situation of 'Twelfth Night': Orsino is played as a surprisingly amusing character, more than a little arrogant with his lounge-lizard attitude and cool-dude shades; the Narrator's role (Jessica Colson) is skillfully interwoven with the entire production, but nowhere more usefully than in this extract,

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navigating the complex emotional map of the lovelorn threesome of Orsino (Liam Beard), Olivia (Lisha Allen) and Viola (Sarah Nias). An oily Malvolio (Graham Smith) suffers horribly at the hands of the energetically spiteful Maria (Rachel Alexander), while a promising young Olivia wrestles with her feelings for Cesario.

'Much Ado . . .' was never more aptly named, as the Company is cleverly brought together in response to this hilarious "Do not you love me" scene, in which the conspirators draw the audience into their wily plot and the excellent Beatrice (Sarah Nias) is a powerful and expressive partner for Benedick's (Richard Culham) equally strong wit.

Superbly-delivered sonnets (Patrick Knox), music and narrative draw together the text and the action, all performed with energy and clarity. Concluding with a bright duet and Company song, this is a most enjoyable entertainment for a summer's afternoon.

Sylvia Coates
NODA Representative

Any observation made by the reviewer is based only on the performance in question. The NODA Representative's intention is to give an objective critique of the production overall and in particular the performance viewed. Any criticism expressed may not be valid at other performances, and is made only to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.

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