

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## As You Like It

William Shakespeare  
Chapterhouse Productions  
Kedleston Hall, Derby  
(2004)

It's been one of the wettest summers on record. You have to agree with Shakespeare when he wrote "summer's lease hath all too short a date". So spare a thought for the actors who've had to carry on with open-air performances while audiences have sheltered under umbrellas, kept dry under covered accommodation or even stayed at home.

Chapterhouse Productions have probably suffered more than anyone else simply because they're one of the biggest outdoor companies in the country. This year they've organised 166 performances of four different shows.

I'd tried on two previous occasions this summer to watch outdoor theatre at Kedleston Hall - the seat of the Curzon family for the past 900 years - only to be put off by torrential rain half an hour before curtain up. It was third time lucky when I saw *As You Like It*. Thankfully the rain held off.

Chapterhouse's aim is to stage "magical theatre in magical surroundings". Kedleston, a Neo-classical Georgian house set in a classical landscape, is indeed stunning and with sheep bleating in nearby fields it's ideal for *As You Like It* - but only parts of the production can be described as magical.

Most of the actors in the company are young and bring an enormous amount of enthusiasm to the show despite the Derby date being one of the last on the tour.

*As You Like It* stands or falls on the relationships between Rosalind and Orlando and to a lesser degree Rosalind and Celia. Director Simon Clark has three actors who work superbly together to give the play a sunny outlook.

Stephanie Nielson, venturing into Shakespeare for the first time, gives an impressive debut as Rosalind. She is full of passion, effervescent and looks as though she's enjoying every moment. Sally Chase is vivacious as Celia and Edward Harrison is ebullient as Orlando.

However, some of the other actors are not as successful. Marcus Houden doesn't portray Jacques with the customary melancholy of the part although he fares better as intellectually challenged Charles the wrestler; Andy Mullins keeps losing his French accent before inexplicably dropping it altogether as Le Beau; Gregory A Smith is miscast as the two dukes; and James McQuillan doesn't look comfortable as old Adam although he redeems himself as William.

There are certain scenes which have a feel of slapstick about them. The wrestling bout has a few moves which are straight out of WWF, foresters who wear Robin Hood hats are like lager louts on a Saturday night pub crawl and one of the sheep is a ventriloquist's dummy who insists on biting people at every available opportunity.

Mark Davies comes up with a few enjoyable moments as Touchstone although he sometimes goes off the script and has a few jokes with the audience.

Presumably Simon Clark has his cast clowning about to make the play more accessible to a family audience. And he's cut the epilogue, replacing it with a jolly song and dance for the whole cast. I had to agree totally with the character near the end of the play who berates the ensemble: "It's not panto, it's Shakespeare!"

Not one for the purists but a jolly enough evening nonetheless.

**Reviewer:** [Steve Orme](#)