

British Theatre Guide

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

The Comedy of Errors

William Shakespeare

Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park

(2010)

The first and final scenes of this open-air *Comedy of Errors* feel dashed off, as if director Philip Franks couldn't be bothered to do much with them. This isn't as big a problem as it might be in a different play: *The Comedy of Errors* is mostly middle.

Franks appears to have judged, by no means incorrectly, that the sob story Egeon (Christopher Ravenscroft) feeds the Duke (Alistair Cameron) in scene one isn't nearly as important to the audience as it is to Egeon (who is, after all, telling it in order to secure himself a stay of execution). Adoptions and shipwrecks don't concern us. All we need to know is that two sets of estranged identical twins are about to be set loose in Ephesus and hilarity, as they say, will ensue.

So yes, the opening scene is interminable, there's little evidence of "grief unspeakable" in Ravenscroft's performance and as such his climactic reunion with his wife and sons is emotionally flat. But as soon as Egeon yields the stage to the twin Antipholi and Dromios, Franks and the audience alike sit up and start paying attention.

The production has a fantastic sense of fun, embracing the absurdity of the play's premise and embellishing it with brand new absurdities, like unexpected song and dance numbers and *Scooby-Doo*-style pursuits with mobs racing past people hidden in convenient wicker baskets.

The contrasting relationships of the Antipholi (Daniels Weyman and Llewelyn-Williams) to their respective Dromios (Joseph Kloska and Josh Cohen) are convincingly fleshed out: Ephesian Dromio (Cohen) is beaten and put-upon by his wealthy master (Llewelyn-Williams) but they always make up in the end, while the less affluent Syracusan pair are on a more equal footing.

This means that when the Antipholi unwittingly swap Dromios or vice versa, as they inevitably must, there's an extra level of humour to enjoy. One Dromio leaves in search of bail money for Antipholus and another returns with a bit of rope - that's worth a giggle. But when Ephesian Antipholus, used to getting his own way, is faced with a Dromio who isn't used to taking orders, hilarity ensues.

Perhaps if Franks had paid as much attention to Egeon's characterisation as to the twins', the production could have gained yet another layer, this time of poignancy. But this production gets belly laughs from a capacity crowd using Elizabethan dialogue, so I say, who needs depth when hilarity is ensuing?

Until 31 July

Reviewer: [Matt Boothman](#)