

# British Theatre Guide

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

## As You Like It

William Shakespeare  
Bridge Project  
Old Vic  
(2010)

The arrival of the Bridge Project is a long awaited treat. The greatly revered Sam Mendes' stage work is now never otherwise seen in London.

In its inaugural year, the Project balanced Shakespeare's [The Winter's Tale](#) with Chekhov, represented by [The Cherry Orchard](#). This time, he pairs two plays by the Bard, with the help of Ted Hughes identifying common themes and presenting a day that is "designed and conceived as a single gesture, a single journey".

The first play in the new collaboration between the Old Vic and the Brooklyn Academy of Music is *As You Like It* with the now traditional mixed Anglo-American cast.

The production might be regarded as a limited success, with its main strength an innate sense of fun shared by the whole cast, whatever their provenance.

On first hearing, American actors do not speak Shakespearean lines as well as the Brits, leaving listeners "tuning in" during the early scenes. There are, though, honourable exceptions.

Designer Tom Piper initially closes down the stage space but that only increases the pleasure when we eventually reach the Forest of Arden.

The person holding the production together is the excellent Juliet Rylance playing Rosalind. She is that rarity, an actress who is as winning in breeches as frocks and has already proved her mettle in the part, winning an Obie following the New York run.

Her paramour is a most unprepossessing Orlando, played by Christian Camargo who has the looks, if not the power, to attract such a delightful lover (in the old sense) and eventually wife.

Rosalind is fortunate in that she has company in her flight from her cruel uncle, Duke Frederick (like his exiled noble brother Duke Senior played by Michael Thomas). Her devoted cousin Celia, a role taken by American actress Michelle Beck, gives up a comfortable life at court to become a country girl accompanying her "brother" in the forest.

With them is one of the production's star turns, Touchstone gloriously played by Thomas Sadoski whose diction is generally immaculate (though he occasionally gets overcome by enthusiasm) and comic timing impeccable, aided by a generous streak of screwball madness.

Much of the most interesting work during the 3¼ hours involves the less significant characters. That might be an unfair description for Stephen Dillane who looks like he has accidentally wandered in from a production of *Waiting for Godot* and does a mean Bob Dylan impression as Jaques.

The character is the epitome of an outsider, who enjoys nothing more than sharing his melancholy in an effort to depress anyone within hearing range. The only person who finds this walking downer really cheering is Jenni Barber's lusty farm girl, Audrey.

Jaques' naturalistic delivery of the seven ages of man speech is refreshing, while by the end, it's hard to keep your eyes off this commoner even when the stage is filled with nobles.

A stage further down the social scale, Aaron Krohn's Silvius is suitably dim and seems destined to be cuckolded by a highly spirited and at times hilarious Phoebe (Ashleigh Atkinson).

The great pleasure of *As You Like It* lies in the knowledge that after an unhappy opening sequence and a romantic sojourn in the forest, all will come right with multiple weddings in the final scene. On this occasion that denouement duly arrives, accompanied by romantic lamplight, bringing the play to a joyous ending

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)