

British Theatre Guide

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As You Like It

William Shakespeare

Stratford Festival

Stratford Festival Theatre

From 1 December 2022

It can be easy to forget how much the style of Shakespearean production has changed even in a relatively short period of time.

This somewhat mannered staging of *As You Like It* from 1983 may look old-fashioned to modern eyes, although it should sound wonderful to the ears, since it comes from a time when actors were universally trained to speak loudly and clearly.

The revival ran for four months and viewers can see and hear an overly enthusiastic audience, but they are invisible during the playing and any laughter has a tendency to sound canned.

Visually, director John Hirsch and designer Desmond Heeley have chosen a period that might be France in the 18th and early 19th century, often frothy and colourful at court, exemplified by the gorgeous clown costume worn by Lewis Gordon's witty Touchstone.

Like so much of Shakespeare, this play centres around warring families, as Roberta Maxwell playing Rosalind is banished from court by a wicked Duke-uncle, following in the footsteps of her father, and is accompanied in exile by her closest friend and cousin, Celia, portrayed by Rosemary Dunsmore.

Before leaving, Rosalind falls head over heels for dashing young Orlando, Andrew Gillies in the role of another unfavoured, dispossessed aristocrat.

In the Forest of Arden (Ardennes), Rosalind and Celia take on borrowed identities, the former changing gender as so many young Shakespearean women do.

This presents plenty of opportunity for entertainment, as she woos and is wooed by her love, amidst growing confusion and floods of the Elizabethan equivalent of romantic e-mails.

At the same time, passions amongst lesser folk are fired, adding to the amusement, a dampener only being offered by perhaps the best of the actors on show, especially when delivering the seven ages of man speech, Nicholas Pennell satisfyingly lugubrious as Jaques.

The filming is generally good, although the music and overt laughter can go a little over the top, while Roberta Maxwell leads the cast effectively, always finding a good foil and Rosemary Dunsmore and, when passion rises on both sides, Andrew Gillies.

This video is available on the newly revamped and relaunched Stratfest@home web site. The library is expanded and the pricing reduced to £6.44 per month or £64.47 per annum. It is a great treasure trove that will give fans of high-quality theatre hours of pleasure.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)