

British Theatre Guide

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As You Like It

William Shakespeare

Royal Shakespeare Company

Holloway Garden Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

18 July–1 September 2024

With tickets for this show at £10 for under 25s, a text stripped of the more obscure bits and a running time of just under 90 minutes, the RSC is boldly developing its strategy to reach a younger audience, for many of whom this was likely to be their first experience of Shakespeare.

Mine was *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at Stratford in 1968, but although that production is now only a blur, one moment still stands out: an hilarious, reluctant, plodding, totally unnecessary circumnavigation of the entire stage by one of Falstaff's hangers-on to reach the exit only a few feet away.

And I'd bet my ducats that for those enjoying this lively, frothy show, there was one such episode likely to stick in the memory more than the story itself: the only one-man wrestling bout ever seen on stage.

Luke Brady, who plays Orlando, had injured his ankle, forcing him to spend the production seated on one side, leaving Peter Dukes as Charles the wrestler to writhe about, alone, as if gripped by the throat by The Invisible Man. It was a showstopper, and, with apologies to the unfortunate Mr Brady, it will be a pity not to be able to leave it in when he recovers.

Music enlivens proceedings from the start, the multi-instrumentalist cast opening with a jazzy, upbeat version of "Autumn Leaves", trombone and saxophone giving way to a quiet violin serenade that transfixed the attention of a babe-in-arms in the front row.

Letty Thomas is a captivating Rosalind, and one could sense the darts of conflicting affections in her mind as she counted off the inconsistent, mad humours demanded in her lover.

Trevor Fox, in a languid, Geordie accent, had just the right quality of melancholic cynicism as Jaques, Chris Nayak had a winning pathos as Silvius, deservedly, finally winning the devotion of Natasha Magigi's Phoebe. Christina Tedders is a supportive Celia, Duncan Wisbey a cheeky Touchstone and Susannah Van Den Berg his rustic amorata.

The production does not try to offer new insights into the play, and rather disappointingly skirts around the question of whether Orlando realises that Ganymede is actually Rosalind in disguise.

Because the play is set partly in the local forest of Arden, and includes the song "Under the Greenwood Tree" and reference to "this wide and universal theatre", it feels at home staged in a temporary auditorium on the lawn alongside the Avon. It is a pleasant environment, with the attractive round parapet and dome of the Swan theatre in the background, spoilt only by the decidedly uncomfortable, forward-sloping plastic seats. In the circumstances, 90 minutes was enough.

Reviewer: [Colin Davison](#)