

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Much Ado About Nothing

William Shakespeare

Royal Shakespeare Company

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

12 April–24 May 2025

It was Dolly Parton who famously said, “it takes a lot of time and money to look this cheap,” and never was a truer word spoken than in the glittering world of Premier League footballers and their WaGs—and the unstoppable march of the very worst of celebrity culture.

The RSC’s 2025 staging of *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Michael Longhurst, is a striking and bold reimagining of the comedic characters so familiar to many an A-level English student, but this is an altogether different experience that is as witty as it is contemporary. We open to familiar chants of “Messi, Messi, Messinaaaa!” celebrating their collective triumph rather than the modern namesake, Lionel Messi.

Pop princess, Hero (Eleanor Worthington-Cox) is set to marry the dashing, much celebrated Claudio (Daniel Adesun), but all is not well in the House of Leoco as a plot is afoot to ruin her reputation through viral social media and derail the nuptials for good.

Meanwhile, Hero’s cousin Beatrice (Freema Agyeman) is a sassy, independent woman who isn’t about to let something as inconsequential as the supposed love of a fickle man (Nick Blood) interfere with her career as a sports broadcaster.

The reframing of such a beloved play might have been jarring for some, but for me, it felt as if this heralds a new era that rightfully challenges the RSC traditionalists in our midst. In a world where the invited press now includes TikTok content creators, this production answers the call to make Shakespeare’s work accessible to all. Gentle tweaks to the text here and there: “being entertained for a perfumer, as I was smoking a musty room” swapped out for references to ‘vaping’ (many of our characters held them—yuck) and messages sent via text, not in person, are all too accurate today.

There were laugh out loud moments—as there should be—but not just in the subtleties of the text, but in visual gags and physical comedy. Leonato (Peter Forbes) is the drunk uncle at every party belting out “My Way”; Hero’s girl gang are dancing on the podium, mobiles in hands. Meanwhile, Messina FC’s boys will be boys on their stag do, complete with travelling bull’s head in hand—a symbol of marriage which continues throughout the play.

While the comedic timing of the whole cast is impeccable, perhaps stealing the greatest laughs of the night is Dogberry (Antonio Magro), our head of security, who won’t be satisfied until it is fully noted down in proceedings that his prisoner, Conrade (Azan Ahmed), called him an ‘ass’.

Jon Bausor’s staging exudes excessive luxury throughout, with the marbled plunge pool later turned gaudy fountain at its centre and the scene of the eye-popping emergence of muscled bodies that would make Daniel Craig blush. The design also makes clever use of screens around the

auditorium displaying text-speak and social media comments, as well as a live feed from on-stage filming. This is something which is very 'right now' in theatre but which does thankfully appeal, and in this context, not just a gimmick—it speaks perfectly to the play's themes of honour and virtue in an unforgiving online world.

The production is a vibrant and inventive success. With standout performances, a slick contemporary backdrop and a thoughtful grasp of the play's emotional depth, it offers something special for both long-time Shakespeare fans and newcomers. Unmissable theatre this season.

*Much Ado about Nothing* plays at Stratford until 24 May.

**Reviewer:** [Rachael Duggan](#)