

British Theatre Guide

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Much Ado About Nothing

William Shakespeare

RSC at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket

(2002)

The RSC's latest London home, the Theatre Royal Haymarket, is a real contrast to its recent predecessors, the Barbican and the Roundhouse. It is a good, old-fashioned traditional theatre with a proscenium arch.

This fits well with Stephen Brimson Lewis' colourful, mid-20th Century Sicilian setting. This features the side of Leonato's house and has the ability to transform itself with moving arbours and church interiors. By the end of the year, he could well be winning awards for this attractive but flexible set. Gregory Doran's production is also well-served by Paul Englishby's varied but always appropriate incidental music.

The play is one of deception and love-hate relationships. The first of these is between the young lovers, Claudio and Hero. He is played by John Hopkins who is particularly good in the church scene where he forsakes his betrothed. Quite why he should have been gulled into disbelieving the love of Hero by the wicked Don John (Stephen Campbell-Moore) and his sidekick, John Killoran's Borachio is, however, one of Shakespeare's little mysteries. Kirsten Parker as Hero is sweetly convincing throughout.

They contrast with their more mature counterparts, Beatrice and Benedick. It seems that when most people think of these parts nowadays, the faces of Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson come to mind.

On this occasion Nicholas le Prevost and Harriet Walter play the duelling couple. He seems to be a little too much the buffoon suffering from a serious lack of charm but really comes into his own when he finally gives up the bottle and seeks dignity as a way of winning the love that they have both denied. She performs well, keeping up the comedy with biting wit that covers her true feelings and convincingly conveying the hurt of a proud spinster.

The support adds much to both the comedy and the serious drama. Christopher Benjamin is a pompous but hilarious Dogberry and Clive Wood a campy funny prince. Gary Waldhorn is very strong as Leonato especially as he first condemns and then resurrects his daughter, Hero, after the accusations of her infidelity.

This light, saucy production is fun in the first part with many subtle flashes of physical humour. When it reaches the real dramas of the last hour, Gregory Doran and his actors come into their own and it takes off to great dramatic effect.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)