

ASC hits a rollicking home run with 'Much Ado'

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Written by
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footlights and spotlights

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Do I like this play? Very "Much Ado." In kicking off the American Shakespeare Center's summer season, director Jim Warren has pulled on his steel-toed sneakers and sent "Much Ado About Nothing" sailing out of the stadium. In fact, the only negative thing I can say about this play — which is the third version that I've seen at the Blackfriars Playhouse — is that, inevitably, it comes to an end.

I know that's being a little selfish, since a standard performance treats the audience to more than two hours of fun, laughter and Elizabethan theater at its rollicking best. And I know that the actors are heaving and glistening with sweat after throwing their hearts, minds, souls and bodies into one of Shakespeare's liveliest comedies for damn nigh 130 minutes.

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what: "Much Ado About Nothing"**when:** Now through November.**where:** Blackfriars Playhouse**tickets and more info:** 851-1733,
tickets@americanshakespearecenter.com

But is that it? Do we really have to go home now? The play is simply that enjoyable.

"Much Ado," like most of Shakespeare's plays, features elaborate story lines that can be difficult — but not impossible — for everyday modern audiences to follow in detail. The good news is that it's not

necessary to understand every intricacy and nuance of "Much Ado's" two intertwined plots in order to understand or enjoy it. The play is, I think, one of the easiest of Shakespeare's works to get a handle on.

All you really have to know is that Hero and Claudio are in love, as are Beatrice and Benedick. Of course, the road to romantic fulfillment for these young couples is loaded with obstacles. Some of them are sinister (Claudio is maliciously and wrongly informed that Hero has been unfaithful to him) and some are hilarious (Beatrice and Benedick make the funny pages' Lockhorns look like a pair of cooing doves).

Swirling around the would-be lovers are a host of memorable characters, including the constable Dogberry, whose mangling of the English language must surely have given Norm Crosby the inspiration for his stand-up routines; Don John, a scoundrel you will love to hate; the oily Conrad and his comrade-in-villainy, Borachio;

and Balthazar, a singer who occasionally needs a little reining in.

It is interesting to note that while Hero and Claudio (ably performed by Victoria Reinsel and Tobias Shaw) are the central lovers in "Much Ado," it is Beatrice and Benedick who usually get the most attention. Their confrontational, combative approach toward love never fails to delight, and ASC veterans Sarah Fallon and Rene Thornton Jr. never fail to burn up the stage whenever they are upon it.

This is, however, a play in which all the actors hit their stride, from the ASC regulars to the interns and apprentices. Victoria Reinsel, in particular, as Hero, shows great promise, as does Daniel Rigney as Antonio. Also standing out in a play full of notable performances are Christopher Seiler as Dogberry, John Harrell as Don Pedro and Luke Eddy as Don John.

Also appearing are James Keegan, Daniel Rigney, Denice Burbach, Erin Baird, Chris Johnston, Allison Glenzer and Nolan Carey.

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