

THINGS TO DO

Labor of love

ASF's graduates pour energy into 'Labour's Lost'

By Rick Harmon
Montgomery Advertiser

The Shakespeare play may have been selected specifically for them, but perhaps no production could have a more inappropriate title for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival master student class than "Love's Labour's Lost."

For while acting is a labor of love for the master of fine arts students, the participants agree that the labor, the training and this production could hardly be more useful.

Edmond Williams, who is both the chair of the department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Alabama and the production's director said the play about young love is perfect for the young people who are part of The Graduate Company of the University of Alabama/Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

But it's not just the plot — a plot in which a Renaissance king convinces his followers to join him in a three-year vow of celibacy only to have a lively battle of the sexes ensue when the Princess of France arrives with her beautiful companions.

"Its wit. Its language. There is so much we can learn from this play," said Scot Mann, who plays Sir Nathaniel.

"I think the language in the play is some of the most difficult I've come across as far as its poetry, and making that poetry clear to the audience."

The words may be both beautiful and witty, but Williams said conquering the language is the easy part of the students' job.

"It's crucial that we realize that these are not just words for the sake of words," he said. "We have to go behind the words and find the person that lies beneath them."

So far, he believes, the students have been successful, creating a production of "Love's Labour's Lost" unlike any that has ever been seen before, but he said this isn't unusual.

"Many of the moments in this produc-

WANT TO GO?

- **What:** The Alabama Shakespeare Festival Graduate Company's Production of Shakespeare's "Love's Labour's Lost"
- **When:** Previews are 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, 7:30 p.m. Aug. 3 and 8 p.m. Aug. 4; official performances are 8 p.m. Aug. 5, 2 p.m. Aug. 6, 7:30 p.m. Aug. 8, Aug. 9 and Aug. 10, 8 p.m. Aug. 11 and 2 and 8 p.m. Aug. 12.
- **Where:** The Octagon at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival
- **Admission:** \$10
- **Information:** 271-5353



Alabama Shakespeare Festival

Actors of The Graduate Company of the University of Alabama/Alabama Shakespeare Festival perform their last performance in 'Love's Labour's Lost.'

ASF Page 3E

Production takes actors to new stage of their careers

By Rick Harmon
Montgomery Advertiser

For a dozen students, "Love's Labour's Lost" is as much a rite of passage as a play. When the production closes, seven actors, two students in stage management

and three students in theater management won't be in the ASF Graduate Company, but the ASF graduating company.

Charlton David James, Jenny Sheffer Stevens, Eric Sheffer Stevens, Regan Thompson, Tracy Liz Miller, John Nagle and Sheffield Chastain

will graduate Aug. 13, the day after the last performance of "Love's Labour's Lost." So will stage management students Christine Fisichella and Nina Shockley and theater management students Melaine Bennett, Becky Dodd and Laura Jansen.

Many are heading to New York after graduation, thanks largely to a New York showcase that they put on before casting agents in April.

"It went incredibly well," said Chastain. "Many of the agents told us it was the best one they'd ever seen. Of the

seven actors who are graduating, all seven had a chance to sign with agents. Some did better than others, but across the board, I think everyone did incredibly well."

The showcase, which at-

Actors Page 3E

ASF: 'Labour's' actors hope to connect with audience

From Page 1E

tion exist because they came out of rehearsal, because the actors found certain things within their characters and within their scenes that worked for them and then incorporated it into the production," he said.

"That happens in every production, and that's why every production of Shakespeare will always be different."

This production will be in the Octagon Theatre, the smaller of the two ASF stages.

That's to the liking of Mendy Garcia, who plays both Katherine and Jaquenetta in the play.

"I think it is more natural

working in the Octagon," she said, adding that the intimacy of the theater allows the performers to gauge the audiences' responses and to interact with them far more than when performing in the larger Festival Stage.

But for Garcia and the other Graduate Company actors, the important factor is not that the program has taken them to the Octagon, but that it will take them to a new stage of their careers.

"Before getting here, I was making a living as an actor, but what I have learned, and continue to learn here, has made such a difference," she said. "It has affected me in so many different ways. Every day I am growing."

Regan Thompson, who plays the

Princess of France in the play, said that all the students see their work in the play as taking them a step closer to their ultimate goal.

"My goal is the same goal as any actor, to do good work and to have continued employment," she said. "I want what every actor wants, to make a living doing what you love."

You will see the Graduate Company actors doing what they love during this ASF production. You also will see the result of their labors. But it's clear no one believes that this will be love's labor lost.

Rick Harmon, who is arts and entertainment editor for the Montgomery Advertiser, can be reached by calling 240-0184 or faxed at 261-1548.

Actors: Agents make offers to ASF graduates

From Page 1E

tracts some of the top agents in the country because of both the reputation of the program and graduates like Michael Emerson who has become a Broadway star, is a huge benefit whether you sign with an agent.

"I was called back by two commercial agents, one theatrical agent and several casting agents," Thompson said. "I haven't signed with anyone, but the showcase has given all of us so many options to weigh."

Chastain got responses from 10 or 11 agents. He has signed with one of the top commercial agents in New York, but hasn't signed with a theatrical agent.

"I think it's going to be sort of a dating process," he said. "You freelance with a couple of different theatrical agencies and then sign with the one that works with you the best."

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Actors Page 3E

Expert linguistic delivery makes 'Love's Labours Lost' a winner

By Allan Swafford
Special to the Advertiser

The Graduate Company of the University of Alabama/Alabama Shakespeare Festival forges a lively, charming and sometimes masterly production of "Love's Labours Lost" in the current mounting of one of the playwright's earliest masterpieces.

In its linguistic exuberance it is no easy play, either for performer or patron. However, these remarkable performers take the hurdles for the most part with ease and carry the theatergoer with them on a joyous ride.

Perhaps the first of Shake-

spere's works to demonstrate his total mastery of our language, it dazzles with verbal brilliance. This very brilliance can lose an audience if the actors lack the verve and intelligence to serve its language or the director's imagination fails to provide much needed guideposts.

Edmond Williams' direction in this production serves both play and audience, neither contorting the first nor condescending to the second. His achievement is made possible by the wealth of talent in the Graduate Company. At one juncture, describing a sharp exchange between Rosalind and Katharine, the princess says: "A

LOVE'S LABOURS LOST

- When: 7:30 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday
 - Where: The Alabama Shakespeare Festival, 1 Festival Drive
 - Single ticket prices: \$10-\$30
 - Ticket information: Call the ASF Box Office at 271-5353 or (800) 841-4273. The box office is open from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday, noon-4 p.m. Sunday and until 9 p.m. on performance nights.
- The set of wit well played. The line piles equally to this production. In "Love's Labours Lost," no

sooner have young King Ferdinand of Navarre and his three attendant lords vowed to spend three celibate years (no woman is to be allowed within one mile of the court) in scholarly study, than the French princess and her three beautiful ladies arrive on an embassy from her father.

There is no suspense here. The conclusion is foregone. We watch the fun as the men succumb to love and the rightly offended ladies tantalize and punish them for their masculine effrontery. Pointing up the impossible situation is the farcical activity of the servants who have been dragged willy-nilly into this vow of celibacy and are not taking it well.

Here you'll find no weak performances, but several demonstrate extraordinary virtue. Among the menials, Christopher Ensweller's Moth is gloriously, vibrantly goofy. In an exquisitely drawn Holofernes, Robert Barry Fleming elevates pomposity to a comic art form. John Nagle deftly plays the fantastic Don Armado with a deadpan bravura. Sheffield Chastain brings unrivaled vivacity and masterly timing to a Costard you'll not soon forget.

Among the principals, Regan Thompson sparkles as the princess opposite. Charlton David, James charmingly boyish king, Tracy L. Miller is a wickedly wonderful, se-

ductive Rosalind to the cool irony of Eric Sheffer Stevens' superb Berowne, a coolness, an irony, and worldly cynicism which make his falling in love all the funnier. This is a truly memorable Berowne.

Autumnal and elegant in its atmosphere, the set by Will Turbyne affords the actors optimum performance space while adding a gentle tenor to the production.

Allan Swafford has reviewed local theater for more than 18 years. You can contact him by writing Allan Swafford, c/o the Montgomery Advertiser, 200 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104 or by faxing (334) 261-1540.

A Delightfully Comic Renaissance Romance. . .



Love's Labour's Lost

by William Shakespeare