

Lifestyle



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March 13, 1999

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Actresses triumph in 'As You Like It'

By Allan Swafford
Special to the Advertiser

REVIEW

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival's newly opened production of "As You Like It" approaches the tangled text with considerable zest and intelligence at all levels, but the center of its strength is its two leading ladies.

The story, which in Rosalind's words is about people "in the very wrath of love," is rife with contradictions which in large part add to the sum of the humor. But it is also studded with moments of puzzling tonal ambiguity, its denouement almost inept from the moment the deus-ex-machina Hymen enters. It is

a play in short that makes improbability, implausibility, its creative principle and, for the most part, the curious ploy works.

In "As You Like It" a usurping duke, having previously dethroned his brother, exiles his niece. His daughter flees with her cousin to the forest of Arden, which is already inhabited by the dethroned duke and his band of nobles. In the rather heavily populated forest we also find various shepherds, shepherdesses, a peculiar vicar and, oddly, the god Hymen.

Rosalind and Celia, the two princesses, fall in love with respectively Orlando and Oliver, two sons of the late Row-

land de Boys, two sons who previously hated each other. At the end they marry in a ceremony that also unites Phebe and Silvius, a shepherdess and shepherd, and Touchstone and Audrey, a mildly witty court jester and a bumpkin. The plot, though complicated, is pointless, a rack on which to hang the often charming wit that characterizes the work.

A strong cast peaks in the performances of newcomer Heather Robison as Rosalind, Shakespeare's largest female role, and Kathleen McCall as Celia. The two exiled princesses are the glue that binds this discursive plot, and these two actresses are an admirable pairing for the roles.

Robison is a vivacious,

very physical Rosalind with a face of remarkable mobility, while McCall is a wry, various and spirited Celia, refusing the temptation to sublimate the character to Rosalind's strength.

To praise these two actresses highly is not to demean the accomplishment of the rest of this large cast. It is a production marked by balance, especially in its casting. Director James Bohmen has cleverly solved some of the difficulties of the convoluted script, beset as it is with inconsistencies, disappearing characters and so on. However, the suggestion of old Adam's death on arriving in the forest of Arden is somehow distasteful and a jarring note.

WANT TO GO?

- **What:** "As You Like It"
- **When:** 2 and 8 p.m. today, 2 p.m. Sunday, 7:30 p.m. April 8, 2 and 8 p.m. April 10, 2 p.m. April 11, 8 p.m. April 16, 2 p.m. April 17, 8 p.m. April 23, 30 and May 1, 2 p.m. May 2, 8 p.m. May 7, 2 p.m. May 8, 7:30 p.m. May 12 and 13, 8 p.m. May 14, 2 p.m. May 15, 7:30 p.m. June 9 and 13, 7:30 p.m. June 17, 2 p.m. June 18 and 25, 8 p.m. June 26, 7:30 p.m. July 1, 8 p.m. July 10, 7:30 p.m. July 15, 2 p.m. July 17, 7:30 p.m. July 21, 8 p.m. July 23 and 2 p.m. July 25
- **Where:** Alabama Shakespeare Festival
- **Admission:** \$20-\$23 today-June 14, \$20-\$24 June 15-July 4 and \$22-\$25 July 5-25 with discounts for



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Heather Robison portrays Rosalind and Sam Wellington plays Orlando in the ASF production of 'As You Like It.'

seniors, military personnel, students and groups of 10 or more

■ **Information:** 271-5353