

U-T 8-14-04

THEATER REVIEW

Free Shakespeare under the stars: What's not to love?

By Anne Marie Welsh
THEATER CRITIC

In Shakespeare, love makes fools of us all. Now a singing Fool's in charge of New Village Arts' latest gift to the city, "Twelfth Night," free and outdoors in Carlsbad.

A piano-playing, NBA-size Feste (Matt Davis) keeps the music flowing through the comedy, set in the 1920s by director and Globe associate

DATEBOOK

"Twelfth Night"

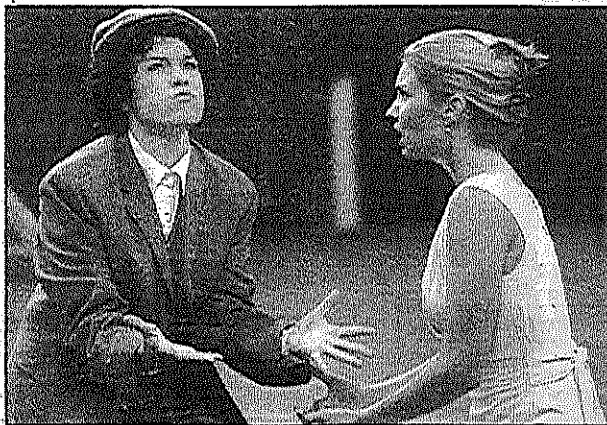
7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Sundays
Through Aug. 22

On the lawn of the David H. Thompson Performing Arts Center, La Costa Canyon High School, 3451 Camino de los Coches, Carlsbad

Free
(760) 433-3245 or
www.newvillagearts.org

Brendon Fox. With a big cast, drawn from all over the San Diego acting pool, the production achieves a fair balance between language and visuals, romance and high jinks.

My careful of 13-year-old guys saw Adam Sandler, Will Ferrell and Comedy Central in Francis Gercke's geeky Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Walter Murray's prank-prone Sir Toby Belch and Tim West's pompous Malvolio. So this may be the show



Viola (Julie Jacobs, left) meets unintended consequences when she dresses as a man and brings messages to Olivia (Jennifer Austin, right) in "Twelfth Night." K.C. Alfred / Union-Tribune

for introducing even the squirmiest of the attention-challenged to Shakespeare.

On a kind of drawing-room set, Fox mostly clarifies the story of separated twins, Viola (melodious Julie Jacobs) and Sebastian (Brennan Taylor), and the confusion that results when both show up — she disguised as a man — among the Jazz Era wealthy of Ilyria.

The passion of lovesick Duke Orsino (Nick Cordileone) for the unattainable, grief-stricken Olivia (Jennifer Austin) didn't register at Thursday's opening, despite their elegant, Southampton-style

clothes. In interviews, Fox has said he was inspired by parallels with the thwarted passion of Jay Gatsby for Daisy in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby."

But as in Fox's opulent "Much Ado" last year on the Globe's outdoor stage, he's updated the context without revealing anything new or essential about the play. Davis' period songs and piano melodies enhance the mood, though, bringing the play's undercurrent of melancholy into several scenes, even when the acting doesn't. Remarkably, given the limited equipment in

the outdoor space at La Costa Canyon High, Jennifer Setlow's lighting and David Weiner's designs work their magic, too.

Several individual performances stand out.

As Viola (dressed as Cesario), Jacobs falls for the Duke with a moonstruck giddiness that's fun to watch, even if her top hat and tails sometimes give her an inelegant Charlie Chaplin look. Like Katie MacNichols' Rosalind, now cavorting through "As You Like It" at the Globe, Jacobs grows physically lighter and more nimble with every scene — as if ditching female identity and falling in love make the body buoyant.

Murray's great fun as the drunken Sir Toby, maintaining his diction if not his dignity. Many of the actors, seldom

seen here in such roles, possess the supple, sonorous voices that can make listening to spoken Shakespeare such a pleasure — Jacobs, Davis, Gercke, West's ludicrous and imposing Malvolio, and Lisel Gorell-Getz, who's terrific as Malvolio's nemesis and Toby's

squeeze, Maria.

This is New Village's third season, its third (and best) free Shakespeare, a most generous and welcome gift.

Anne Marie Welsh: (619) 293-1265;
anne-marie.welsh@unlontrib.com