

Much Ado About Nothing review

Image by The Stage. Emily Tucker and Anna O'Grady in Much Ado About Nothing at Watford Palace Theatre. Photo: Richard Lakos

Brigid Larmour transforms Shakespeare's enduring comedy "Much ado about nothing" into a witty and charming tribute to the women of World War Two.

Encountering the Watford Palace's lively and innovative adaptation of the acclaimed comedy "Much ado about nothing" is a step back in time. The 16th century luminous Messina transforms into the 1940s wartime Britain but Benedick and Beatrice's antagonistic love story continues to bubble warmth and hilarity as ever.

What shocks one the most of Brigid Larmour's contemporary version is the especially convincing masculine air captured by the all-female cast. The gestures, the expressions, the body language- it's simply intensely authentic. A marvelous Ana O'Grady captures Benedick's distinctive wit impeccably, paired with Emily Tucker's lighthearted Beatrice. The flirtatious teasing is almost as entertaining as Joanna Brooke's glorious Dogberry, who, from the start, sets off the play with a lively and humorous atmosphere. But, not even Dogberry's absorbing slapstick can save Nyla Levy's appalling performance as Beatrice's cousin, Hero. Levy lacks emotion, any kind of facial expressions or body language; it was simply a dull performance.

However, one of the numerous joys of this "response to the all-male productions of Shakespeare's own time", as Larmour states, is the involvement the actresses have with the audience. Brooke's humorous Dogberry leads the most comical scene of the entire play by asking a member of the public to take part in the second act. Dogberry, alongside Rebekah Hinds lovable but absurd Borachio took the lead as the most entertaining characters of the play.

Perhaps is the affable, cheerful air which becomes nearly palpable when stepping in for the first time in the bombed-out auditorium or maybe is the atmosphere created by the demolished set scattered with flags, air raids notices and sandbags which converts Larmour's "Much ado about Nothing" into a genuinely delightful experience. Larmour's decision to cast just women for the play elevated the spirit and served as an "affectionate homage to the servicewomen of World War Two".