

REVIEW: MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR A WINNING PACKAGE FOR 2014 SHAKESPEARE FEST

Any part of the show is a marvel, the retro costumes, the slapstick moves, the outdoor theater vibe, the “cuckold” clan dance, but as a package, the show is a memorable winner

By *DAVE PERRY Staff Writer*

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Shakespeare would have loved America. Americans certainly love him, even if they don't know it.

We love the Bard of Avon for his uncanny intuition in what makes us laugh and sigh. In “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” Shakespeare capitalizes on the humor, romance and optimism of a class of Englanders that would help create a nation of Americans. This year's Colorado Shakespeare Festival's production of “Merry Wives” capitalizes on our willingness to laugh at our own self-centered, middle-class lives of posturing and parading.

Director Seth Panitch's “Merry Wives” is a crowd-pleasing testament to a situational formula that's worked on stage and screen for more than 500 years. With a fresh theme and a hammy cast, this production sure is working this summer at the Mary Rippon Outdoor Theater in Boulder.



You've seen this play a thousand times hidden in endless sitcoms and Hollywood comedies. Two savvy and wise-cracking women get hit on by an swaggering, conceited pompous ass. This time, it's Sir John Falstaff. He thinks he's playing them, but the women play him as the arrogant stooge. Throw in a jealous husband, a whiny daughter, manipulative parents, site gags, bawdy jokes, funny foreigners and pounds of puns, and you've got everything that made legends out of stars from Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn to Fred, Wilma, Barney and Betty in “The Flintstones.”

By wrapping the show in a Catskills resort in the early 1960s, Panitch creates a fun and frolicking vehicle that drives this centuries-old play right into Boulder's famous outdoor theater. The explosion of middle-class culture at The Mount Windsor Hotel in the Catskill Mountains is the perfect parallel to 17th century Windsor England. The cast trots out endless natural sight gags that work because retro kitsch is so cartoonish by nature. Panitch sets the tone by creating his Falstaff as a washed-up Las Vegas Strip comedian downsized to summer-resort venues. Michael Winters delivers the Jackie Gleason suave buffoon needed to pull the part off, but he missed the mark by adding the Peter O'Toole inebriation that makes you understand how anyone could be so full of themselves

MEMBERSHIP.

Vanessa Morosco and Mare Trevethan scream ‘60s middle-class sensibilities as Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, the show’s Betty and Wilma or LaVerne and Shirley. More than anyone in the show, these two are able to make Elizabethan English sound natural coming from under a retro hair dryer. Likewise, masters Ford and Page, played by Peter Simon Hilton and Scott Bellot, expertly work the physical comedy and beat-poetry shtick built into the production.

But the show belongs to Geoffrey Kent’s bumbling French playboy, Doctor Caius, a monument to his pun name. Kent runs away with every scene he’s in, sometimes just by driving a retro-golf cart onto stage, other times by pushing obnoxious French-accented foreigner jokes past their limits, but always by commanding the space and timing around him. He was a natural in a naturally funny role.

The entire production is a successful mixture of very old theater and very retro shtick seen under the mesmerizing outdoor lights on CU’s Boulder campus. Any part of the show is a marvel, the retro costumes, the slapstick moves, the outdoor theater vibe, the “cuckold” clan dance, but as a package, the show is a memorable winner.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

Part of the 2014 Colorado Shakespeare Festival

CU Boulder Campus outdoor Mary Rippon Theater

Tickets: \$18-\$54 with some discounts

303-492-8008

www.coloradoshakes.org

July 20, 22, 25, 26, 29 Aug. 2, 7, 9

Curtains at 6;30 or 8 p.m.

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