

Like 37

ColoradoDrama.com

Current

Archives

Related Links

Essays



The Merry Wives of Windsor

The Merry Wives of Windsor have never been quite as merry as in this hilarious farce served up by director Seth Panitch and the Colorado Shakespeare Festival ensemble. Set in 1662 in the Catskills, replete with a healthy dose of pop songs and dances from that era, the adaptation makes liberal use of original nightclub material and character reinvention, all to great effect.

Sir John Falstaff (Michael Winters) seeks to fulfill his expansive sexual appetite at the expense of cuckolding Masters Ford (Peter Simon Hilton) and Page (Scott Bellot), but the comely objects of his desire, Mistresses Ford (Vanessa Morosco) and Page (Mare Trevethan) compare their identical mash notes from him and make plans to thwart the rotund Falstaff's lascivious intentions.

The bard provides a series of extremely provocative and circumstantially mirthful situations in which Falstaff brags to Master Ford, in disguise as Master Brook, that he has an assignation with Mistress Ford which he is willing to gift to him. Winters' persistent braggadocio and eventual clever comeuppance and contrition make for an hilarious and sweet ride, and offer an informative and comical contrast to Hilton's seething and, later, apologetic Ford.

Morosco and Trevethan play it cool as the wiley title heroines, leading a variety of fun period dance numbers and knee-slapping melodramatic send-ups. In the end, Mistress Ford gets the respect she deserves and Mistress Page, like her husband, comes around to a more enlightened view of love and marriage. Bellot's polished and directive Master Page provides a strong basis for a magnanimous transformation.

Lots of wonderful work from the ensemble, including: Geoffrey Kent's scene stealing Caius; Tammy L. Meneghini's spirited Mistress Quickly; Rodney Lizcano's boisterous bible-thumping Pastor Hugh Evans; Sammie Joe Kinnett's sweet ventriloquism as Pistol and Nym; Krya Lindsey's seductive Anne Page; Joshua Archer's winsome hunk, Fenton; Sam Sandoe's faint-



(l to r) Mare Trevethan as Mistress Page,
Michael Winters as Falstaff
and Vanessa Morosco as Mistress Ford
Photo: Patrick Campbell
Colorado Shakespeare Festival

hearted Shallow; Ian Andersen's nerdy Slender; and Benjamin Bonenfant's slick Host.

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* runs in repertory with *The Tempest*, *Henry IV: Parts 1 & 2*, and *I Hate Hamlet* through August 10th. For tickets: 303-492-8008 or <http://www.coloradoshakes.org/tickets>.

Bob Bows

Additional Oxfordian biographical notes:

De Vere became familiar with the town of Windsor during his youth, when he was being tutored by Sir Thomas Smith, former Secretary of State of the late king Edward, at Smith's Buckinghamshire estate, Ankerwicke, about an hour's walk from Windsor, and later, during a convalescence when he was under Burghley's guardianship, in a rented room just a 10-minute walk from the village, past the oak tree that spurred the local legend of Herne the hunter, invoked at the end of the play. Between Smith's impressive library and de Vere's book purchases at the time (including various Italian folk compilations, Plutarch, Chaucer, and the famous marked and annotated Geneva bible), it was a fertile time for the young scholar.

The characterizations for the play were drawn contemporary relationships and from manuscripts:

- Sir Philip Sydney as Slender (de Vere did not like Sydney and would lampoon him in numerous plays
- Lord Robert Dudley as Justice Shallow (reappearing in *Henry IV, Part II*)
- Doctor Caius as himself (De Vere met Caius at Cambridge University as a youth, and later as Elizabeth's physician; the character reappears in *King Lear*
- Falstaff is partly drawn from a de Vere family manuscript, "Chronicle of the Blessed Martyr Sir John Oldcastle," written by a onetime Carmelite monk, John Bale (who wrote *King Johan*, an influence on de Vere's *King John*). Actual events in de Vere's life that are adapted for sub-plots involving Falstaff are evident in *Henry IV, Parts I and II*, which we shall discuss in our notes for that play.

Regarding the romance in this play, there was a time, before his extended continental excursion, that de Vere truly loved Anne Cecil ("sweet Anne Page"), but he had some competition for her hand, given that her father, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, was the most influential man in England, running the empire for Elizabeth. Early on, Burghley took aim at the charming and talented Philip Sidney as a match for Anne, and had the interest of Sidney's uncle, Lord Robert Dudley (earl of Leicester), in arranging such a propitious political alliance.

However, Leicester was concealing the fact, until the marriage contract was drawn up, that Sidney had lands, but little money. Though the wedding never happened, de Vere enjoyed lampooning Sidney and Leicester, including details of the marriage contract in the play (i.e., Anne Page is set to receive a £700 inheritance, just like Anne Cecil, and Slender admits, just like Sidney