

Twelfth Night is lively and riveting

Twelfth Night
Arts Club Theatre
SUB Theatre
November 21

review by Rob Galbraith

The Arts Club Theatre production of *Twelfth Night* was excellent. The seventeen-member cast handled the complex intertwining of the plot extremely well, giving the audience in SUB's sold out theatre a lively drama that riveted one's attention for the duration of the performance.

Every member of the Vancouver-based theatre company was strong. John Moffat is superb as the head-over-heels-in-love Duke. Norman Browning's rendering of the snob Malvolio is excellent. Sir Toby Belch (Jay Brazeau) and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (David Marr) virtually steal the show in the first half of the work, playing the comic scenes as if they were doing them for the first time, with freshness and vivacity. Feste (Simon Webb) tended to dominate in the second half, exhibiting enormous talent, and even an acceptable singing voice. Webb took a number of liberties in his role as the fool, and tended to upstage those about him, yet any liberties indulged in always bore a favourable response from the audience, and added to the humour of the work. Suzanne Ristic played Olivia almost like a giggly schoolgirl, though she stopped short of rendering the Countess pretentious. She was obviously a favorite among audience members.

The only performance of the evening that fell short of excellence was that of Melanie Miller, who played Viola, Sebastian's sister. Her portrayal of Orsino's messenger boy was at times forced, perhaps in an attempt to emphasize the confusion and bewilderment that her character felt, loving the Duke she served, and unable to reveal that she is a female. Nevertheless, it appeared as if it was taking too much effort to act out the role. This problem carried over into her diction, which came across as stilted, more stilted than the role required. These are, however, minor criticisms.

The set was appropriately simple, allowing for rapid scene changes. Malvolio's cell, consisting of an approximately four foot high by three foot deep and wide barred and blacked-out box, was particularly clever. It's compactness allowed it to be moved to the front of the stage quickly, and gave Feste ample room to move over and about the structure, relatively uninhibited. The opening in the top of the box allowed Malvolio to



gesture his despair effectively.

The most telling review a play receives is, of course, audience response, and Thursday night's just loved it. People watched intently, laughed freely and even clapped several times during the play, after a particularly good scene. And, as the actors bowed, the audience again showed their approval with a standing ovation. *Twelfth Night* was great.

interview by Rob Galbraith

Jay Brazeau, who played Sir Toby Belch in last Thursday's Theatre Arts Club production of *Twelfth Night*, took time out from his pre-performance preparations to talk to *The Gateway*. Edmontonians have seen him before in John Gray's *Rock and Roll* and at the Citadel in *Duddy*. He is a lively, funny man, though quite unlike his stage-persona Toby Belch.

Gateway: How did you get into theatre? Do you have formal training?

Brazeau: I've been acting professionally now for ten or eleven years. I never went to university, and came into acting through the back way. I was playing in a band for a children's theatre production in Winnipeg, where I'm from, and they needed a guitar player for the symphony orchestra. So I played guitar and Santa Claus, and got involved in theatre through that end.

Gateway: Do you find it difficult to do a play on a different stage every night?

Brazeau: Bus-and-truck Shakespeare! I'm a firm believer that you're only as good as your audience. If you get an audience that really wants to be there, you get all the energy from them. Sometimes you get a really negative energy, which makes it difficult, and you have to put it on automatic pilot. You try to

obtain as an actor the ability to be foolproof. Someone from the audience says to you that you were good that night, and you know that you weren't, it's just that you've got to be a really good faker. As an actor, you want to develop the ability to be a fantastic faker.

Gateway: Is Edmonton a city actors like to perform in?

Brazeau: I've worked in Edmonton quite a bit actually, and it's a hard city. It's a city of extremes, being very cold, and being a new city. People here are very conservative. Most people in the theatre community say it's death to play here. When I did *Rock and Roll* here, I was asking taxi drivers to come down, get free tickets to the show. This is the number one play all across Canada, won all the awards, and we couldn't get anybody here. It just goes to show you that in Canada you can be the biggest hit in the world in Toronto, and you go one hour away in a plane and nobody knows who you are.

Gateway: Do you still get nervous?

Brazeau: Yes, I get the most nervous on the closing night. It's the last night that I know something can go wrong.

Gateway: Do you like doing Shakespeare, as opposed to more modern plays?

Brazeau: (Sarcastically) I can't stand Shakespeare! It's so awfully hard. You're taking something that's four hundred years old and trying to breathe new air into it, while making it understandable to a modern audience. It's a really big challenge. Anytime you do Shakespeare in this country they're comparing you to the Stratford Festival. I also find Shakespeare really difficult because it's a whole other language. It's hard to make sense of it for the audience. When you do Shakespeare, you have to blow people away with your voice. And there are jokes in Shakespeare that if you're a sixteenth-century historian you're slapping your knees. If you can't fully understand what's being said, you obviously can't get the gist of the play. I prefer working with modern plays, new plays, seeing them from the start, working with the writer to making something really new. I worked as a director for a little playwright, and that's really a lot of fun. There's a sense of novelty about it, nobody else has touched it before. It's yours, you're the first time, you create the first impressions of it. This year I'm trying to work on the classics, though, since I don't have the university background. It's (*Twelfth Night*) a good show. I've been in a lot of turkey shows, and this is a good show, people are getting there money's worth.

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