

2011

Stage Center Theatre Newsletter - Nov. 2011

Kathleen Weiss

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SEASON 2011-2012

Stage Center Theatre

MAINSTAGE

Twelfth Night

One of Shakespeare's greatest comedies, *Twelfth Night* revolves around mistaken identity. Viola is shipwrecked in Illyria and believes her brother, Sebastian to be dead. She becomes a page (named Cesario) to Duke Orsino who asks her to woo Olivia for him. Olivia falls for Viola (in disguise), Viola for Orsino and confusion ensues. There are comic subplots involving Olivia's uncle Sir Toby Belch, another suitor for Olivia, a silly squire, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the fool Feste and Olivia's steward Malvolio. Romance and laughter abound.

Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare

Cast

Brad Cantwell-Orsino
Yim Chiu-Lady in Waiting
Paul Hearnon-Feste
Duncan Macnab-Valentine/Officer
Blake Malley-Fabian
Jill Matel-Maria
Bruce Moore-Sir Toby Belch
Arin Mulvaney-Viola
Bo Young Park-Lady in Waiting
Julie Partyka-Olivia
Jenna Portenlanger-Lady in Waiting
Rand Riggensberg-Malvolio
Brian Rogers-Captain Antonio
Nich Shea-Sir Andrew Aguecheek
Nick Skyba-Sea Captain/Priest
Ptryk Szwankowski-Sebastian
Gregory Taylor-Curio/Officer

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAIN STAGE 7:30 P.M.

Reservations: (773) 442-4274

Twelfth Night

December 1-3, 7-10

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

WORKSHOP 10:00 A.M.

Reservations: (773) 442-5971

Anne and the Tiger Raja

November 4-December 7

Monday, Wednesday, Friday

Stage Center Theatre

A great time for family and friends of all ages, Stage Center Theatre also offers a great value on entertainment. Admission to all productions is **free for students, faculty, and staff with a valid NEIU ID.**

Main Stage

General Admission.....\$10

Seniors/Alumni/Students.....\$8

Children 6-12.....\$6

NEWSLETTER STAFF

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Seeking Relevancy in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

This December Stage Center Theater presents the gender-bending Shakespearean comedy, *Twelfth Night*. The production is one of the many interpretations Shakespeare's work has seen in the past five hundred years. With so many theaters continually performing the Bard's works—why are Shakespearean works like *Twelfth Night* a perpetual favorite of actors, directors, and teachers? NEIU English professor, Bradley Greenburg discusses Shakespeare, the seriousness of comedy, and why the world is constantly reimagining the two.

Twelfth Night is different in many ways. "One of the things that make it unique is that it blends serious ideas of comedy with the humorous," says Greenburg. "The play opens with a pretty serious set-up, a shipwreck and mourning with mainly female characters mourning a dead brother and father. The female characters are forced to drive the action by reacting whereas male characters tend to be passive." Shakespeare has the ability to blend both comedy and tragedy so that the surface presents a comical tone while serious themes lurk beneath the surface. The audience can laugh at the take-charge action of the female characters, but is simultaneously forced to acknowledge themes of sexuality and gender because of their assertive attitudes.

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Shakespeare knew that comedy allows for dangerous exploration because the audience can accept the plot as trivial. In reality, comedy allows for these unexplored themes to have a voice. Greenburg says, "Comedy gives us a reason to take the characters seriously. My sense is that Shakespeare doesn't like farce. If you chose his silliest comedy like *The Comedy of Errors*, even with its silliness it begins with a death sentence. The kind of screwball comedy farce that's funny all the way thorough doesn't exist in the Shakespeare universe. Instead there's a contrast." The contrast between the humor and underlying tragedy suggest Shakespeare's definition of comedy is different from what we know today. While the action performed on stage is funny the seriousness is there the entire time. Greenburg says that "*Twelfth Night* is full of tragic possibility, little dead ends that are almost tragic, but aren't. The serious things get shuffled out of our recognition. Shakespeare manages to do so much of that and still maintain the façade of humor." Presenting tragic circumstances under the guise of humor lets Shakespeare ride the line between the two. This is why so many are drawn to his plays—riding the line is incredibly attractive. Few works are able to mask their true genre under the guise of comedy. *Twelfth Night* is unique for its ability to couple both into a palatable play that delivers tragedy under the guise of comedic relief.

Tension between comedy and tragedy fosters character development. *Twelfth Night* features Feste, the fool often seen as a comedic staple and stock character, is both comedic and unnerving. Greenburg describes him, "He's not a stock character. I don't know what makes him different. I think he's meant to suggest you know what that type of character is supposed to be. You don't get him. He tries to explain himself, but you don't get it. He torments Malvolio [another character]. It's cruel and goes over the limit, but people think it's funny. As a tormentor it suggests that comedy isn't always about things being funny." Feste is laughter and cruelty—the dark comedy that spans *Twelfth Night*. Feste makes

everyone just a bit uncomfortable and his maliciousness forces the audience to make a choice between alarm and laughter. Most audiences go for the easy choice and laugh at Feste's torturous exploits.

With comedy there is often no doubt that all will turn out well. Shakespeare manipulates this constraint to put forth controversial themes that might otherwise be rejected. Greenburg says, "Gender, sexuality, politics, masculinity...there's always work to do. That's one of the things that attracted me to Shakespeare. If you are going to take the time to do something, choose something that's complex." *Twelfth Night*'s themes are as relevant in 2011 as when it premiered to a conservative group of Protestants in the 1500s. Greenburg even says, "I think they are more relevant now. We live in a soci-

ety where these things are in our public discourse. What it means to be a man, woman, or in love." As a part of public discourse these themes are now beyond the constraints of comedy. Rather than write off these themes as mere comedic devices, today's audience can acknowledge these ideas as real.

The intentions of comedy are greater than the laughs. "Shakespeare's plays are funny but it's not their main feature...it's to explore issues that surround everyday life and social morals. They take seriously those everyday kinds of issues," explains Greenburg. Even more, the themes present in *Twelfth Night*'s fictional Illyria or the English Renaissance exist in contemporary society. The universality of Shakespeare and the strategic ambiguity of his characters present an endless array of options.

CHILDREN'S THEATRE: *Anne and the Tiger Raja*

Anne and the Tiger Raja
by David Eliot

Production Staff

Director-Ann Hartdegen
Asst. Director-Sylvia Alvarado
Music Director-David Mitchell
Mask Designer-Kate Murphy
Business Managers-Will Mares,
Wintana Tedla
Stage Managers-Elizabeth Soto
Brittany Gerstenberger
Costumer-Yim Chiu
Drop Designer-Jenna Portenlanger
Props Mistress-Corin Gutierrez

Cast

Musician-Jenna Portenlanger
Indira-Monica White
Katrina-Katrina Boomer
Anne/Mouse Deer-Catalina Vasile
Lola/Porcupine-Yim Chui
Doug/Orangutan 2-Adam Francis
Andy/Orangutan 1-Chris Elkiswani
Adilene-Adilene Arellano
Adrienne-Adrienne Brandyburg
Bully Sister 1/Tiger Raja-
Adrienne Scott
Bully Sister 2/Tiger 2-
Arbella Al-bazi

Wit and folk wisdom help students battle and understand bullying and intimidation. Anne is being bullied by two older girls on an urban playground. They tease her, take her money, and when Anne complains they call her names, tempting her to get her older brother to beat them up. Indira, a nanny and storyteller from India, reasons with her and tells the children a story "Why There Are No Tigers in Borneo." featuring the bullying Tigers of Java, the timid but clever Mouse Deer of Borneo, witty Orangutans, and Porcupine partial to puns.

