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Much Ado About Nothing

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"What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?" Act I, scene i

Written: 1599

Wide Eyed Productions ; March 2, 2008 New York, USA

**Director : Kristin Skye Hoffmann ; Starring : Lea McKenna-Garcia, Brian Floyd,
Reviewed on : 2008-03-02 21:15:28 ; Reviewed by : Antonia Mandry**

What can be lost in a Broadway or name-brand production is perhaps that kind of mad joy and creative hysteria that is so evident in Kristin Skye Hoffmann's *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Set on the basement stage of a box-like room in the Gene Frankel Underground Theatre, the intimate subterranean feel of the production is emphasized by the blurring of the line between stage and audience. Small cafe tables and chairs where audience members can sit are set up on the edge of the stage area. Since the action of the play is updated and modernized to "Caf  Messina," the effect serves to layer the levels between audience and players.



• **Beatrice (Lea McKenna-Garcia)
Beseeches Benedick (Brian Floyd)
Photo Credit: Nicolle Medina**

The set itself mimics this informal feel, with the bar in the back, framed between two doors and a real privy, used by the audience as well as the actors (this can lead to an ill-timed and accidental entrance into the action by a member of the audience). Sofa, coffeetable, chairs and stools all serve to create a warm caf  feel. Similarly, costumes mostly reflect realism, save for Sky Seals as Don Pedro's afro, and Melissa Johnson as Verges' stripped pajamas and boots attire.

Costumes and set aside, it is the performances that really sell this play, a comedy which relies heavily on the wit and chemistry of its Beatrice and Benedick. Lea McKenna-Garcia and Brian Floyd certainly sell the latter, with believable and sexy love-making (if all too brief!), and the wit is there as well. It is always fatal to a production if the actors involved do not understand the words they speak: McKenna-Garcia and Floyd have no such problems. Indeed, all the actors enjoy the language, save perhaps for Trevor Dallier's Claudio who seems to require time to warm up.

The cast is charming indeed with main cast and supporting cast equal parts entertaining. Notable is Jerrod Bogard's delightful physicality during the scene where Floyd uses him as a physical expression of his confusion. Bogard has an amazingly expressive face and uses his limbs with abandon. Justin Ness as a "Mr. Incredible"-like Dogberry is rather more handsome than usual depictions of the character, but it is the villainous trio of Don John (Scott Voloshin), Borachio (Danny Gardner) and Conrade (Andrew Harriss) that bring something sharply new to



Sir John Gilbert, R.A.,
Beatrice and Benedick

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the play. Gardner's Borachio is perhaps the most traditional approach of the three, with his slimy sexuality oozing all over the place. His portrayal of Borachio's "confession" at the end is highly reminiscent of other Borachios, but Voloshin and Harriss bring a kind of geek villainy to their roles that I have never seen. Harriss is a pugnacious and jittery Conrade, whose part is small but is performed with a delightful gusto, generating honest and completely atextual guffaws from the audience. Voloshin's Don John hunches over, slinking in and out of frame like an evil afterthought.

The performances carry the entire play, with small imperfections that mar an otherwise slam-dunk production. Some of the few things that do not really gel are the kickball clothing that Don Pedro wears on his entrance, the pot-smoking priest, and the clichéd text-messaging at the beginning to get around talking exposition. But these are minor quibbles and what it really comes down to is this: does the performance deliver something new as well as capturing the magical core of the play? The answer is: infinitely and more.

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