

Playfulness is the thing in Denver Center’s “Much Ado About Nothing”

 denverpost.com/2022/10/28/denver-centers-much-ado-about-nothing

October 28, 2022



Benedick (Geoffrey Kent) and Margaret (Desiree Mee Jung) in “Much Ado About Nothing” at the Denver Center. (Michael Martin Photography, provided by the Denver Center)

By [Lisa Kennedy](#) | lkennedywriter@gmail.com | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: October 28, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. | UPDATED: October 28, 2022 at 6:26 a.m.

There’s a pleasing knowingness to the Denver Center Theatre Company’s “Much Ado About Nothing.”

Some of that wink and nudge is, of course, the work of William Shakespeare. But there is also a drollness to the staging of the Bard’s comedy that director Chris Coleman, his well-oiled ensemble and talented craftspeople bring to the story of Beatrice and Benedick that evokes the fleet repartee of 1930s and ‘40s movies. Think Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant in “The Philadelphia Story,” or Rosalind Russell and, yes, Grant again, in “His Girl Friday,” each of which premiered in 1940.

The action has moved to 1930’s Messina, Sicily. Things open at the estate of Leonato (Gareth Saxe) as the war has ended and Don Pedro and some of his men are headed to Messina.

With their arrival, two rom-com pairings ensue, each bedeviled in drastically different ways. Handsome Claudio (Gerrard James) falls for Leonato's only child, the lovely Hero (Jennifer Paredes). Don John, the illegitimate brother of Don Pedro, has plans to disrupt their affection. The verbal sparring partners, Benedick and Beatrice, are tricked into love.

Like Grant, actor Geoffrey Kent brings a sly and game physical energy to Benedick. Dana Green steps into Beatrice's elegant ensembles and wry observations. She has the sharper wit of the two. (Last February, Green left an intriguing impression when she portrayed the American spy Betty Thorpe in the Colorado New Play Summit's "Rubicon," which was directed by Coleman. It's good to see her back.)



Benedick (Geoffrey Kent) and Beatrice (Dana Green) spar in the Denver Center's aptly screwball production of "Much Ado About Nothing." (Michael Martin Photography, provided by the Denver Center)

An actor of nimble comedic timing, Kent doesn't exactly steal the show, but he does level the playing field, making Benedick a hoot. He may not win the banter contest, but he has the audience's loyalty when it comes to being a likable goofball. Even so, Benedick is not as suave as he imagines. Witness how easily he falls for Don Pedro's ruse about Beatrice's love for him.

Beatrice is just as easily played by her cousin Hero (Jennifer Paredes) and Hero's attendant, Ursula (Kate Gleason), who loudly discuss within earshot Benedick's fondness for her. What proves amusing is how easily the prickly pair, who each forswear marriage, give into rumors of the other's affections.

Not unlike those 1930s screwball comedies, “Much Ado” presents an independent woman maneuvering a rigged system. Beatrice is a dynamo, speaking her mind with an insouciant and camouflaging wit. But just how rigged the system is becomes clear as the comedy unfurls.



Beatrice (Dana Green) cracks wise in the Denver Center’s swanky production of “Much Ado About Nothing.” (Michael Martin Photography via the Denver Center)

The subplot concerns the too-easy besmirching of Hero by Don Pedro’s “bastard” brother, Don John (an understatedly dastardly Gavin Hoffman). Hero is lovely but doesn’t quite live up to her name. And Claudio’s own heroism, tales of which reach Leonato’s estate right before he arrives from the battlefield, gets tarnished in the eyes of the audience when he believes the worst about the woman he’d fallen so hard for.

The cast does its best to temper the retrograde focus on Hero’s purity. As Leonato, Saxe takes some of the sting out of his betrayal of his daughter by finding the contriteness in his Duke. As Don Pedro, Rodney Lizcano (a staple at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival) knows the beats and teases them well, keeping the playful humor afloat. For outright laughs, Rob Nagle arrives as Dogberry, the pleasingly buffoonish constable who learns of Don John’s plot.

That Don John’s dark machinations can be so easily, dimwittingly foiled says something about the flimsiness with which the menfolk were ready to condemn Hero. Beatrice never wavers in her certainty about her cousin’s character.

Related Articles

From the hanging pink-and-lavender bowers of flowers (set design by Klara Zieglerova) to Tom Hagerman's original music and onstage musicianship of Alexander Sovronsky, who plays Balthasar and Verges, the production has no shortage of eye and ear candy. Like the production itself, Kevin Copenhaver's costumes have silver-screen elegance delivered in technicolor hues.

If you go

"Much Ado About Nothing." Written by William Shakespeare. Directed by Chris Coleman. Featuring Geoffrey Kent, Dana Green, Gareth Saxe, Rodney Lizcano, Gerrard James, Jeniffer Paredes, Rob Nagle, Gavin Hoffman, Desirée Mee Jung, Kate Gleason, Thomas W. Ainsworth, Jihad Milhem, Logan Ernstthal. At the Denver Center's Kilstrom Theater in the Helen Bonfils Theater Complex, 14th & Curtis streets. denvercenter.org or 303-893-4100.

Subscribe to our weekly newsletter, [In The Know](#), to get entertainment news sent straight to your inbox.



Lisa Kennedy
