

Peppermint Creek's 'Shakespeare in Love' is easy to love

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By [Paul Wozniak](#)
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Finally! Shakespeare that isn't just for Shakespeare nuts. Instead of a striving to be a conventional Shakespeare production, Peppermint Creek's "Shakespeare in Love" edges toward creating a contemporary satire of Elizabethan era show business.



Still, it includes enough of Shakespeare's text from a variety of scripts to make anyone appreciate the raw power of poetry. The production also proves to have a strong script and solid direction, which holds a cast of mixed experience closely together.

Based on the 1998 hit film of the same name, Lee Hall's stage adaptation Tom Stoppard and Marc Norman's original screenplay not only maintains the story, characters and best lines from the film, but also seamlessly integrates Shakespearean play conventions and dialogue to make it accessible — even for Shakespeare haters.

Instead of a pillar of artistic virtue lectured about by college professors, this William Shakespeare, played by Joe Clark, is a broke, horny, procrastinating writer/actor struggling to create the blockbuster production of his day.

With a looming deadline and a bad case of writer's block, Will struggles until he discovers his muse — the rich and ravishing Viola DeLessups, played by Hannah Feuka. Viola as herself, and as her male disguise Thomas Kent, inspires him to write his greatest tale of woe.

As the title character, Clark is appropriately needy and moody. He's best when playing off Feuka and Dale Wayne Williams as his friend and fellow playwright Christopher "Kit" Marlowe. For her part, Feuka gives Clark plenty to work with. She creates two distinct characters and effortlessly transitions between the two.

Will's love also extends to his contemporary Marlowe in a role heartily expanded from the film version. Clark and Williams play off each other like brothers, particularly in a hilarious balcony scene that nods to "Cyrano de Bergerac."

Other actors of note: Joseph Dickson as the moneyed, misogynist Lord Wessex who is destined to make Viola his wife, Kathleen Egan as Viola's anxious nurse, Johnny Mocny as the cocky and confident actor Ned Allyn, Chad Swan-Badgero — unrecognizable under a wig as competing theater owner Richard Burbage — Laura Croff as posh mean girl Queen Elizabeth and Phineas Reed as the precocious, blood obsessed John Webster. Reed in particular nails his accent and has the attitude of a fearless boy who could take on any adult given the chance.

The production elements, from the set to the costumes, give the entire show an air of authenticity. Swan-Badgero's elaborate set design, constructed by Swan-Badgero, Jeff Boerger, Matt Swan-Badgero, Jack Mishler and Hannah Feuka, looks like a scaled replica of the Rose — complete with an enormous balcony, pillars, and lots of entrances and exits. Chanae Houska's period costumes are aided by nicely fitted wigs by Daniel Moore, allowing the actors to move with style.

Lorena Ndokaj's lighting design works better in some scenes than others. Reflective water effects in one scene complete the illusion of a boat in a moonlit river, while a lack of spotlights struggle to separate private conversations within a larger group scene.

Considering all of the logistical challenges of this production, director George Popovich makes the entire production feel cohesive and smooth resulting in a Friday night opening in under two hours including intermission. It's a challenge mirrored in the story itself that allows the audience to appreciate the drive, struggle and rewards of creating great art.

“Shakespeare in Love”

Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.

8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 25-Saturday, Oct. 27; 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 28

\$17/\$12 student or senior 65+

Miller Performing Arts Center

6025 Curry Lane, Lansing

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peppermintcreek.org