



Canada's Shakespeare in Love Proves Touching and Wonderfully Waggish

by Jim Volz. Written on 2016-08-24. Published in 2017 Issue 1.

For the production: *Shakespeare in Love* (2016, Stratford Festival of Canada, Canada). See production details at the end of the review.

AFTER TWO DAYS OF BLOODY BATTLES AND “HURLY-BURLYING” ON CANADA’S STRATFORD Festival stages (*Macbeth*, *Richard the Second*, *Henry the Fourth*, Parts 1 and 2, and *Henry the Fifth*), the North American premiere of *Shakespeare in Love* was a most welcome fantasy journey into what Director Declan Donnellan called Tom Stoppard’s “dream of Shakespeare.”

Based on the screenplay of the movie by Marc Norman and Stoppard (that surprised everyone by grossing over \$100 million at North American box offices in 1998), the new play was adapted for the stage by Lee Hall and captured much of the magic of the original movie while adding thrills that only a live production could accomplish. The play first opened in London in 2014 and Hall estimated that the play retained “around 90%” of the original movie’s script.

Set in London in 1593, theater manager Henslowe’s feet were being held over the fire (literally) until he made due on his debts to money lender Fennyman. His only hope was Shakespeare’s promise of a new play, *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate’s Daughter*, that the Bard had doubly sold to his competitor, Richard Burbage. Perhaps needless to say, madness ensued as the play morphed into *Romeo and Juliet* and, in search of a muse, Shakespeare discovered both the actor of his dreams and the love of his life in the beautiful Viola de Lesseps. The problem was that Viola was promised, by Queen Elizabeth herself, to Lord Wessex, and disregarding the potential peril of his best friend Kit Marlowe, Shakespeare offered up Marlowe’s name when Wessex threatened to kill him for “wooing” his wife to be.

What followed, in the able hands of Director Donnellan, was a frenzied, madcap series of witty scenes spouting references to the greatest hits of Shakespeare and John Webster’s to the delight and glee of the knowing Stratford audience.

Stephen Ouimette was perfect as the constantly besieged Henslowe, Steve Ross offered a fun foil as Burbage, Tom McCamus was hilarious as ruthless businessman turned actor Fennyman,

Rylan Wilkie was bold and pathetic as Wessex, and Brad Hodder shined as the star turned supporting player Ned Alleyn. It's never easy to play a character that everyone in the audience feels they "know," yet Luke Humphrey created a sincere, confused, besotted, redeemed Shakespeare, and Shannon Taylor as Viola matched Humphrey's passion and honesty scene-by-scene. The mature Stratford crowd tittered vociferously when Shakespeare's bare-buns shined with the moon in the rapturous love scenes—a fun surprise reversal of the movie's focus on Gwyneth Paltrow's 1998 Viola.

Saamer Usmani was marvelous as Shakespeare's loyal friend and fellow playwright Kit Marlow, and Tal Shulman was an impeccably creepy John Webster (as he should be). Sarah Orenstein sparkled as Queen Elizabeth, and it was a well-cast and finely tuned company, overall.

Nick Ormerod's ingenious scene design was cleverly manipulated for both on stage and back stage action, the clothes with their quick changes and gender switching demands were accomplished with aplomb, and Kevin Fraser lit it well. Jane Gibson's choreography and Terry King's original fight choreography were eye catching and entertaining, and Paddy Cunneen's work as composer along with Peter McBoyle's sound designs enhanced the rapid-fire pace of the play while capturing the ever-changing moods of the transitions from boisterous rehearsals to intricate private moments between the lovers.

This is a "new" Shakespeare play that will be making the rounds of Shakespeare Festivals for many years to come as playwrights Stoppard, Norman, and Adapter Hall balance the playfulness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the fights of *Henry the Fifth* and the cleverness of *The Taming of the Shrew*, envisioning the beginnings of the Bard's glorious reign as Western civilization's greatest playwright.

Jim Volz is an international arts consultant, author, producer, and professor based in Orange County at California State University, Fullerton. He served as a longtime critic/arts columnist for New York's Back Stage and founding editor of the Shakespeare Theatre Association's international magazine, Quarto. He has produced over 100 professional productions, consulted for over 100 arts institutions and published more than 100 articles on management, arts criticism, Shakespeare, and theatre in American Theatre, Oxford University Press's Theatre Research International, Hollywood's Drama-Logue and myriad other articles for national and international publications. He is a Ph.D. graduate from the University of Colorado, Boulder. jvolz@fullerton.edu

Production Details

General

<i>Title</i>	Shakespeare in Love
<i>Year</i>	2016
<i>Theater Company</i>	Stratford Festival of Canada
<i>Theaters</i>	Avon Theatre (Canada)
<i>Start Date</i>	2016-06-01
<i>End Date</i>	2016-10-16

Cast

SAM	THOMAS MITCHELL BARNET
NED ALLEYN	BRAD HODDER
WILL SHAKESPEARE	LUKE HUMPHREY
PETER	JOSH JOHNSTON
VALENTINE	JOSH JOHNSTON
KATE	RUBY JOY
MISTRESS QUICKLY	RUBY JOY
FENNYMAN	TOM McCAMUS
ADAM	MIKE NADAJEWSKI
BOATMAN	MIKE NADAJEWSKI
QUEEN ELIZABETH	SARAH ORENSTEIN
MOLLY	SARAH ORENSTEIN
HENSLOWE	STEPHEN OUIMETTE
RALPH	GARETH POTTER
NURSE	KAREN ROBINSON
WABASH	ANDREW ROBINSON
BURBAGE	STEVE ROSS
JOHN WEBSTER	TAL SHULMAN
CATLING	COLIN SIMMONS
HENRY CONDELL	COLIN SIMMONS
LADY CAPULET	COLIN SIMMONS
SIR ROBERT DE LESSEPS	MICHAEL SPENCER-DAVIS
TILNEY	MICHAEL SPENCER-DAVIS
VIOLA DE LESSEPS	SHANNON TAYLOR
KIT MARLOWE	SAAMER USMANI
WESSEX	RYLAN WILKIE
SPOT	BEAN

UNDERSTUDY

DORA

Creatives

DIRECTOR

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

LIGHTING DESIGNER

SOUND DESIGNER

COMPOSER

CHOREOGRAPHER

ORIGINAL FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHY

STAGE MANAGER

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

ASSISTANT DESIGNER

ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHER

ADAPTOR

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER

GUITAR, CELLO, VIOLIN, RECORDERS,

MELODEON, AND HURDY-GURDY

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY CO-WRITER

DESIGNER

LUTE-GUITAR, RECORDERS, TIN WHISTLE,

TROMBONE, AND PERCUSSION

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

ASSOCIATE FIGHT DIRECTOR

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY CO-WRITER

DECLAN DONNELLAN

TED WITZEL

BONA DUNCAN

KEVIN FRASER

PETER McBOYLE

PADDY CUNNEEN

JANE GIBSON

TERRY KING

BRIAN SCOTT

ELIZABETH McDERMOTT

MELISSA ROOD

MEGHAN CALLAN

MARY-JO CARTER DODD

ADRIENNE GOULD

LEE HALL

JARETH LI

GEORGE MEANWELL

MARC NORMAN

NICK ORMEROD

TREVOR PATT

OLI ROSE

GEOFF SCOVELL

TOM STOPPARD