



## Annapolis Shakespeare Creates a Niche in the American Northeast

by Jim Volz. Written on 2013-08-19. First published in the *ISE Chronicle*.

For the production: *Much Ado About Nothing* (2013, Annapolis Shakespeare Company).

IT HAS TO BE DIFFICULT FOR ALL THE SMALLER SHAKESPEARE FESTIVALS IN AMERICA TO SEE THE bulk of National Endowment for the Arts theatre funding, corporate sponsorships, foundation grants and other much-needed resources go to the same behemoth theatre companies year after year. While the Public Theatre's much-heralded Free Shakespeare in the Park captures National arts headlines with generally star-driven productions and Washington DC's Shakespeare Theatre Company gobbles up awards and government dollars, many theatres in the Northeast struggle to find audiences, actors, playing spaces and capital.

One ambitious company that has managed to quickly make a mark for itself with limited resources, a young, talented acting core, and a clever, creative design and production team is the emerging professional classical theatre, Annapolis Shakespeare Company. Founded by Sally Boyette-D'Angelo in 2010, the company is focused on "bold, re-imagined, entertaining and accessible interpretations of Shakespeare and the classics."

The company's recent doo-wop, fancy-dancing *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING* morphs the Bard's too oft demure battle of the sexes romance into an energetic, enthusiastic romp that takes full advantage of the company's youthful company. Chandish Nester's Beatrice offers a witty, stylish foil to Grayson Owen's funny, frenetic Benedict, and Alyssa Bouma's Hero is a charming eventual match for Michael Ryan Neely's cocky turned penitent Claudio. Best of all, these lovers can dance! Backed by a winning ensemble (including Alex Foley, Devion McArthur, Eric Porter, Rob McQuay, Peg Nichols, Ben Lauer, Tim Torre, Stephen Horst, Jonathan Jacobs, Chelsea Mayo, Kimberlee Wolfson, Deryl Davis, Hunter Kane, Clifford Jamieson, Eli Stiewing, and Miranda Savage), this acting company plays together as well as any Shakespeare company in America (including more financially endowed members of the prestigious League of Resident Theatres and Theatre Communications Group).

Artistic Director Sally Boyett-D'Angelo's direction is crisp, fast-paced, and crowd-pleasingly flamboyant, Ken Skrzysz's choreography is playful, silly and perfect for this 1950s farce and Paul E. Hope's fight choreography adds panache to the boisterous proceedings. In the world of the Hotel Messina, where a juke box takes center stage; snazzy costumes and LED lights provide razzle-dazzle; and jagged crystal-looking palm fronds frame the entire madness, special recognition must be given to Scenic Designer Steven Royal, Lighting Designer Brian Allard, Costume Designer Maggie Cason and Technical Director Jeffrey Harrison.

One of the joys of working with the world's only publication created by and for producing Shakespeare companies (Shakespeare Theatre Association's *quarto*) is that I've been able to visit many American and international companies for over 20+ years as an editor and writer. Like so many of America's 200+ Shakespeare Festivals, the Annapolis Shakespeare Company produces for the pure joy of tackling the classics, entertaining audiences, and offering opportunities for a core of collaborative artists to pursue their passions. These wonderful companies contribute to economic development, industrial recruiting, travel and tourism, and the overall quality of life of a city. They deserve the support of their communities and the attention of corporate, foundation, government and individual donors. This production of *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING* is a great reminder that exciting performances are often found in the smallest professional venues and that much ado can indeed be created out of streamlined resources.

*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*