

'Much Ado' actors find new humor in old script

The University's production of the Shakespearean farce is filled with wit and comedy

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

These days William Shakespeare is not so much a playwright as he is a standard by which theater productions are judged. The common logic is that if you can't perform Shakespeare, you can't perform. Because the quality of a given play is rarely ever in dispute, the performance is the sole ground on which to critique a Shakespeare production.

Let's step away from that mindset for a moment and say this concerning "Much Ado About Nothing": Most people do not find 500-year-old puns funny. Because humor is based heavily on a frame of cultural references that an original audience will have but the following audience may not, it often translates poorly.

However, this is not the case with the University's version of the play, which finds new forms of humor within the script through emphasizing different aspects of the dialog, comic stage direction and the simple pleasures of extreme overacting.

One of Shakespeare's better (and wittier) farces, "Much Ado About Nothing" deals with a group of soldiers staying in the home of the governor of Messina and the various romances and intrigues that occur during their visit. The play is well cast, particularly in the case of leads Sarah Griner and Chris Hirsh, both juniors, who play the battling lovers Beatrice and Benedick. Griner handles Beatrice's fork-tongued dialogue with grace, occasionally adding emphasis where it will have a more modern effect. The not-so-subtle way she pronounces "Benedick" is a

good example.

Hirsh aims for a more over-the-top style of acting, and at times seems to be channeling the spirit of an "In Living Color"-era Jim Carrey. The fact that he bears an uncanny resemblance to America's favorite fart-smith only solidifies the comparison. One of the play's true pleasures is watching him spew streams of frantic Elizabethan gibberish while prancing around like some Jerry Lewis bastard child in a pair of unflattering tights. During the play's dramatic middle section, his comic overacting also makes his change into a more serious character all the more poignant.

Other roles also deserve mention. Junior Alexander Dupre, as the treacherous Don John, is fortunate to be blessed with a face that just shouts, "Hi, I'm evil." Sophomore Jordan Wolfer, as the comic Constable Dogberry, seems to have developed a set of mannerisms and is determined to wear them into the ground. That's a compliment, by the way.

The production also works beyond the acting. The costume and set design follow one of the modern precepts of Shakespearean productions, which jettisons historical accuracy in exchange for an expressionist amalgamate of colorful styles from different periods. In this case director Robert Barton has made the odd choice of flamenco as the tone setter. Spanish dress and dance fill the performance, which is interesting considering the play is set in Sicily. Of course, this is imposing purist logic where it is neither desired nor necessary, and the style is pleasing to the eye without distracting from the play itself.

Dance factors into a large portion of the production, with tango and



Tim Bobosky Photographer

Chris Hirsh and Sarah Griner practice on April 29 for their roles as Benedick and Beatrice for the University production of Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing." The play runs through May 29 at the Robinson Theatre.

flamenco as the choreographic style of choice. While some of the dancing is stiff, (it is easy to see who has taken a dancing class) it's well done and never interrupts the pace of the performance.

Overall, the play is well done and works as distracting entertainment, which is exactly what a farce such as this is meant to be.

Contact the senior Pulse reporter at ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com.

'MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING'

What: "Much Ado About Nothing" University faculty/staff and non-University students; and \$12 for the general public. Tickets are available in advance at the EMU Ticket Office and at the University Theatre Box Office the night of performance.

Where: Robinson Theatre

When: 8 p.m. May 20 to 22, May 28 and 29; 2 p.m. May 23

How much: \$5 for University students (with ID); \$9 for seniors,

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