Much Matchmaking

UT offers lively *Much Ado.*

For the majority of us, everyday life is an amalgamation of drama, misperceptions, simple pleasures and the mundane. Recognizing this, Shakespeare (and later, writers of shows such as "Seinfeld") tapped into these seemingly unimportant events as a way to appeal to and entertain an audience. And entertain is precisely what the University Theatre does in its production of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

For those unfamiliar with Shakespeare's comedy, here it is in brief: Three friends return to Messina following a victorious war. Claudio is promptly smitten with Hero, the governor's captivating daughter. Benedick, a confirmed bachelor, and Hero's sharp-tongued cousin, Beatrice, volley verbal jabs at one another in a merry war of the sexes. Once Claudio and Hero get together, they participate in a jolly game of matchmaking to try to bring Beatrice and Benedick together. Meanwhile, Don John, Don Pedro's spiteful brother, conspires to ruin Claudio and Hero's happiness by enlisting his minions to taint Hero's reputation. Believing the lies, Claudio shuns Hero at the altar. More schemes are hatched, fools and villains unmasked, misunderstandings mended, and disclosure in the end revealing, yes, it's all been much ado about nothing.

Playing Claudio and Hero are Jay Hash and Juliet Strong. Hash is noble as both the lovesick suitor and the betrayed lover. Likewise, Strong is delightfully enchanting and coy. While both put in strong performances interacting with each another, they really shine with other members of the cast, particularly in the highly comedic scenes.

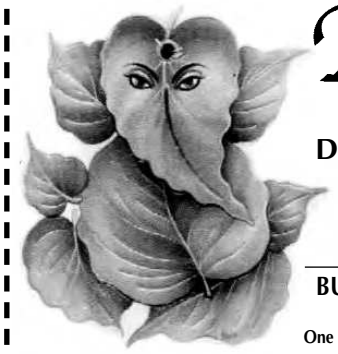
While the main plot evolves around obstacles to the union of Claudio and Hero, the play's sub-plot between the battling Beatrice and Benedick is much more interesting and entertaining by comparison.

Together, Sarah Griner and Chris Hirsh play the dynamic duo in their respective roles as the spunky and assertive Beatrice and the cocky, confirmed bachelor, Benedick. Griner proves her versatility by revealing both Beatrice's soft, vulnerable side, as well as her proclivity for launching saucy riposte. Conversely, Chris Hirsh was born to play Shakespeare. Like a dashing Errol Flynn, Hirsch puts in a standout performance, easily winning over the audience with his quirky mannerisms and comedic athleticism.

Also putting in fine performances were Steve Weihmeier as Leonato, Andrew Beck as Don Pedro, Alexander Dupre as the villainous Don John, and Brandon Finch, who is an awesome singer.

Using a simple, no frills set, the production crew makes great use of light and shadow to express night and day and different locales. Although the production doesn't strive for authenticity — incorporating Spanish dances such as the Flamenco and Tango into choreographed energetic dance scenes, and the use of brightly colored, non-Shakespearean period costumes — it all seems to work. *Much Ado* runs through May 23. EW

Sarah Griner as Beatrice and Chris Hirsh as Benedick in UT's *Much Ado About Nothing.*



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