

Dromio (Tasso Feldman)
escapes for a moment



T. CHARLES ERICKSON

IT'S ALL JUST A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

A Comedy of Errors on the Elizabethan Stage through Oct. 12

Shakespeare's confounding comedy is adapted into a rough-and-tumble musical Western (think a Looney Tunes version of *Deadwood*) that manages to be a madcap romp and, despite its overindulgences and low humor, a quite entertaining piece of ensemble work.

The play begins traditionally enough with Egeon (Michael J. Hume) getting arrested in a small town "west of the Pecos" for trespassing without any money to pay the fine. The Sheriff (Hassan El-Amin) sentences Egeon to death but is so intrigued by the story of his lost twin sons (along with their twin servants) at sea and Egeon's quest to reunite with his family that he postpones the hanging for a full day (allowing the comedy of the play to unwind in this foreboding atmosphere).

To outline the rest of the twisted plot would be near impossible (OSF prints a handy flow chart in the program), but thankfully director Penny Metropulos added a narrator, José Luis (René Millán), to soften the script for ease of digestion. Luis is the audience's genial tour guide; as such, he sometimes dumbs down Shakespeare's play to the point of mockery, especially when he impersonates the Frito Bandito. Yes, be forewarned: Mexicans, Chinese, the obese, snake oil salesmen and more all become the butt end of jokes in this production.

As for the musical numbers (by Sterling Tinsley, with lyrics by Metropulos, Tinsley and Linda Alper; the trio who brought you last year's hit-or-miss *Tracy's Tiger*), most are welcome interludes between all the bustle, but some come off as a bit excessive and self-indulgent. (When Alper, who plays Emilia, performs a solo bit, the play feels paused so she can ham it up.) But *COE*'s real coup comes in its fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants action sequences (thanks to Movement Director John Sipes) that allow one to get caught up in the chaos of a highly confusing play but that drop back into balance at the sound of a gun. — *Chuck Adams*

POSTMODERN ANGST, ZANY STYLE

The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler at the Bowmer Theatre through Nov. 1

In the cul-de-sac of tragic heroines live some of the greatest women of fiction and film. Forever.

In this play by Coos Bay native Jeff Whitty (*Avenue Q*), characters only die when they are forgotten by the public. This is a problem for Henrik Ibsen's 19th-century heroine Hedda Gabler, doomed to endless nights of suicide. Although neighbor Medea has found peace with her own endless cycle, Hedda and her maid Mammy (from *Gone With the Wind*) decide to set out to change themselves and thus their fate.

Whitty's whimsy keeps the audience engaged, whether he leads his characters through a sojourn in the Verdant Glade of the Christs or to a midnight party aboard the African Queen with two wise-cracking, self-loathing homosexuals, reminiscent of 1970's *The Boys in the Band*. Literary and theatrical references, possibly too many, abound. Acting is strong across the board, with notable performances by Robin Goodrin Nordli as Hedda and Gwendolyn Mulamba playing a variety of roles.

The central theme of "Can people change?" darkens to a question of "Should we change?" Does a self-actualized Hedda, ready to take control of her life, serve a literary purpose? What about Mammy? Can she escape servitude? Or are their plights essential to Western literary tradition?

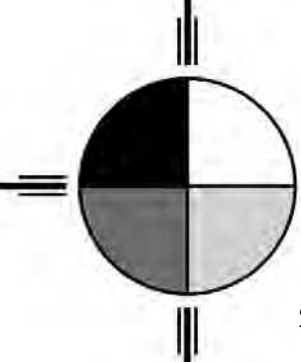
Bill Rauch harnesses this fascinating play, keeping its best elements intact: extreme kitsch, deep thoughts, true authenticity and a hero's journey for heroes who might not get to enjoy their destination. Hedda laments, "Is this how it feels to be real? To live your life dreaming of some *deus ex machina* that's never going to come?" Even without that last-minute hand of God, you'll still enjoy not being able to resolve your issues along with great literary characters in Whitty's exceptional play. — *Anna Grace*



Mammy (Kimberly Scott) and Hedda (Robin Goodrin Nordli)

JENNY GRAHAM

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