

Life and How We Live(d) It

Falstaff: knight, corrupter, swindler, liar, cheat and far more.

Far, far more. In last year's *Henry IV, Part 1* at the OSF, David Kelly played Sir Jack as the buffoon, his jokes as broad as the fat suit encasing Kelly's slender frame. Though that was successful enough, Falstaff gets a depth upgrade this year with Michael Winters, who played Big Daddy in last year's sensationally good *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Falstaff makes us love him despite himself, and Winters makes this Falstaff a contemplative rogue who knows himself well enough to know he will never reform. The tragedy of *Henry IV, Part 2* comes not just when old King Henry IV dies, having seen his hard-won kingdom fall to shreds of civil war, but later, when the new king must take up his mantle.

For kings aren't, can't be, solely human; they can't simply whore and drink and make or ruin plans to steal money from travelers, as Prince Hal (John Tufts) did with his friends Poins (Howie Seago) and Bardolph (Brent Hinkley) and his mentor Falstaff in *Part 1*. Shakespeare knew that his audiences, familiar with the Great Chain of Being, would understand why. Kings are touched with divinity. Prince Hal *must* amputate the undisciplined part of himself to become Henry V. So he wastes no time at his coronation creating the most heartbreaking scene in all of Shakespeare, the famous public denunciation of Falstaff.

Tufts, with help from costume, set and lighting designers, looks otherworldly in this scene, and Winters evokes the shock, pain and wounded tiger pride of the aging Falstaff. The audience may remember Falstaff's speech to Hal from *Part 1*: "For sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff ... banish him not thy Harry's company: banish plump Jack, and banish all the world." As prince, Hal could fool around in that world and befriend this merry rogue; as king, Henry will not.

If you didn't see last year's play or don't know *Part 1*, no problem: Watch *Part 2* as a tale about sexy, energetic Elizabethan life, mixing pleasure and cynicism, drink and food and friends – or watch it as a tale about aging, inheritance, loss and grief, the changing of the generations. The sadness comes leavened with Falstaff's bawdy, iffy humor; in this production, James Edmondson's gorgeously acted Master Shallow adds more than a jot of fun.

This play's about life. See it.

Henry IV, Part 2 runs through Oct. 7 on the Elizabethan Stage.
– Suzi Steffen

Falstaff (Michael Winters)
doing what he does best



T. CHARLES ERICKSON

Shenanigans, Ringers, Pirates!

The smash hit of the summer at the OSF, *Pirates* scores another one for artistic director Bill Rauch, whose desire to bring singing to the hallowed grounds of Ashland won him sellout crowds with *The Music Man* in 2009.

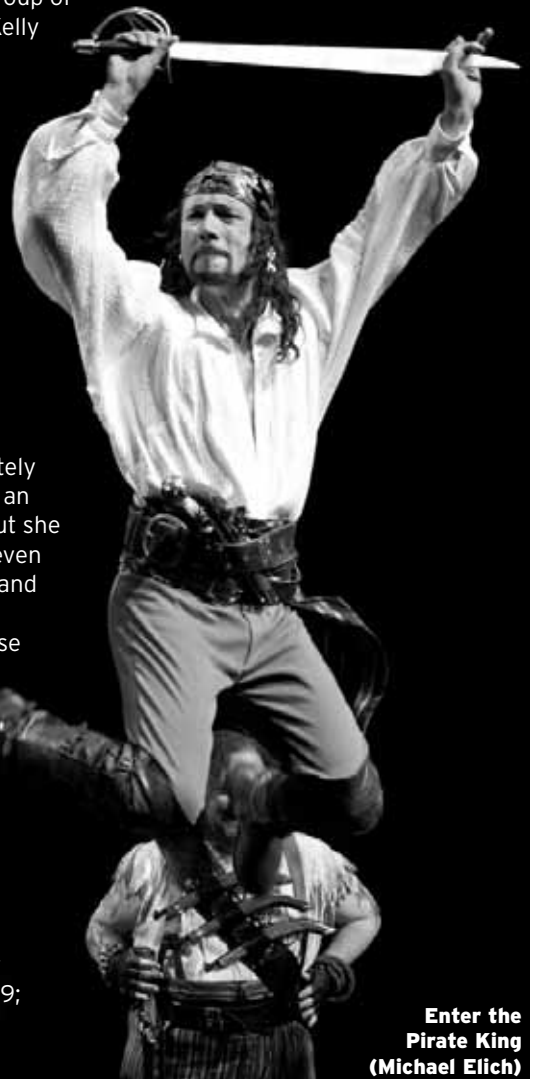
In this Gilbert and Sullivan piece, where the stakes could hardly be lower or the outcome more assured, the sheer goofiness of the plot means little. Pirate apprentice Frederick is turning 21 and plans to devote himself to a life of eradicating his former friends and employers; he falls for an aristocratic girl named Mabel; there's fooforol involving Leap Year; some London bobbies get involved; and also, *pirates!*

But the Pirate King (Michael Elich, marvelous as usual) brandishes his sword; Frederick (Eddie Lopez) looks appropriately innocent and torn between his group of friends and his true love; David Kelly talk-sings "The Major-General's Song" with glee and panache; and Mabel ... ah, Mabel.

The Elizabethan Stage gained a bank of speakers over the off-season, and that was a good change. Actors like Lopez and Elich sound just fine as they sing without straining, and the daughters of the major-general dance a splendid little song around ever-moving boulders. Then Mabel (Khorī Dastoor) starts into "Poor wand'ring one," and it's immediately apparent that Dastoor's a ringer, an operatic star. She can also act, but she provides flights of song lovelier even than *Pirates'* fabulous costumes and choreography.

If you have the slightest sense of humor or delight, get your tickets now, for *Pirates* has sold out almost all its run (the OSF added several Monday night performances, listed below).

Pirates of Penzance runs through Oct. 8 on the Elizabethan Stage. Extra Monday performances: Aug. 8, 29; Sept. 19; Oct. 3. – Suzi Steffen



Enter the
Pirate King
(Michael Elich)

Some Slight Zany

For young King Ferdinand of Navarre and his three best friends, swearing off women and all other pleasures in a quest to become famed scholars is about the stupidest thing they could contrive. Their foolishness is compounded when a beautiful princess and her quick-witted friends arrive, sending the young men into a frenzy of maudlin love poetry and awkward attempts at wooing. And we all get it, because most of us have had the pleasure of being 20 years old and stupid, or are looking forward to it.

Director Shana Cooper's production sets the young aristocrats up as frat boys, replete with boom box, expensive shades and a food fight. Gregory Linington has a particularly thoughtful performance as Berowne. The exuberance of their youth and wealth is mirrored in their slightly smarter ladies. All are delightful as they interact on a set and in costumes that look like Henri Rousseau's cheerful painting *The Football Players* come to life in the 1950s.

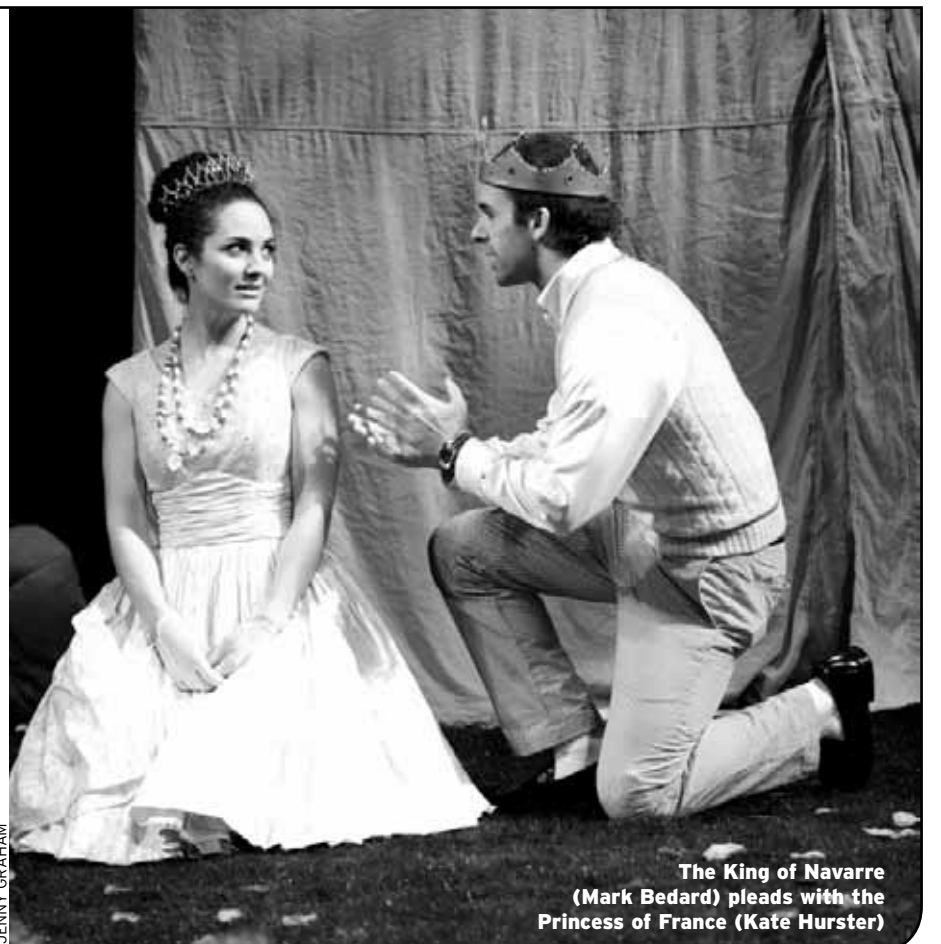
As the nobility frolic in fields, the commoners imitate their actions. Emily Sophia Knapp plays a sharp Moth to Jack Wills' hulking Muppet of a Don de Armado.

Seriously smart actor Jonathan Haugen is cast as the simpleton Costard, making the character over into one of Shakespeare's wise fools. It's interesting, and it works.

Much of the direction makes *Love's Labor's Lost* a charming, sweet and fun evening, just as it should be. The plot provides a warm home for the roaring silliness running rampant at OSF this summer.

Then there were the things that make you go hmmm ... Moderately clever ideas were unnecessarily stuffed into the action. Cooper needs to give her audience more credit. Costard's lines are funny enough, there's really no need to wrap him in shiny blue fabric. Ultimately, many of the bits distracted from the humor and romance inherent to the play.

Love's Labor's Lost has one of the least satisfying of all Shakespeare's complicated endings. Here Cooper's greater instincts as a director shine through, crafting what was the nicest finish I've seen to this play, leaving us not with rich kids who didn't get their way, but young people who are finally growing up. – Anna Grace



The King of Navarre
(Mark Bedard) pleads with the
Princess of France (Kate Hurster)

JENNY GRAHAM