

RUMOR HAS IT

Whedon's winning take
on Shakespeare

For years, Joss Whedon fans have been reading about the writer-director-composer's Shakespeare brunches — at which cast members from his beloved shows would gather, drink, eat, read the Bard's plays and generally (we imagine) have about as much fun as nerds can have with their clothes on. With the release of *Much Ado About Nothing*, we finally get to attend one of these famed brunches, though the mimosas are BYO.

Filmed in less than two weeks in Whedon's covetable California home, the film is a zippy, streamlined take on *Much Ado* that stars more than a few Whedon regulars, including a few who cheerfully upend any notions of previous typecasting. Amy Acker (*Angel*'s Fred) is a surprisingly excellent Beatrice, tartly trading barbs with Alexis Denisof's Benedick. Denisof seems less comfortable than some of his co-stars, but those of us who remember him as uptight Wesley (from *Angel* and *Buffy*) get to take extra delight in the scene in which Benedick eavesdrops most clumsily on his comrades.

Those comrades include Claudio, played by *Dollhouse*'s Fran Kranz (more recently seen in *Cabin in the Woods*), who sheds his nerdy previous characters easily (and shirtlessly). Claudio is in love with pretty young Hero (Jillian Morgese), who is wooed on Claudio's behalf by — oh, you know, I could spend my entire allotted word count explaining the romantic tangles of *Much Ado*, but you probably read it in high school and besides, the plot isn't the point. Shakespeare's comedy has a dark side, and



Whedon — though he's good for plenty of laughs — is as interested in what ol' Will had to say about the absurdities of love as he is in the clever wordplay that flies between Beatrice and Benedick. *Much Ado* hinges on a truly ugly scene in which Hero is spurned because her intended and her father believe her to be a cheating trollop; of course, no one thinks to investigate these charges before they fling accusations. The villain, Don John (Sean Maher, delightfully good at pretty villainy), upsets the romantic apple cart seemingly just because it'll make people unhappy, which is the reverse of the reason Beatrice and Benedick's friends conspire to bring them together: Maybe they'll really fall in love. Everybody wants to see what happens when rumor and hearsay collide with insecurity and doubt.

Swiftly and neatly, with pauses for parties, song and

dance, song and drink, and the beautiful bumbling of Nathan Fillion as Dogberry, Whedon brings Shakespeare's characters together and pushes them apart again. He paces the film like a dance, and his actors, both longtime familiars and new faces, move smoothly through their steps. Though the characters are adults, Whedon teases out the ways they act just like insecure adolescents; you can see just how these old tales influenced something as distant as *Buffy* and, in turn, how Whedon's previous projects color his interpretation of Shakespeare. Dressed up in black and white and decked out with endless decanters of wine, *Much Ado* is more elegant, more obviously grown-up, than much of Whedon's past work — but the precision melding of playfulness and darkness, meaning and jest, is exactly what we expect from him. Invite us over again, Joss, OK? ■

JUNE 26-JULY 4

THE GREAT GATSBY
5:30
FRI-SUN MAT 2:30

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
4:20, 7:00, 9:30
FRI-SUN MAT 2:00

THE EAST
8:30

MUD 2:25, 7:00, 10:10
OBF presents **OTELLO** (1986) 5:00
THE ANGELS' SHARE
3:00, 7:30 (no 7:30 show on 7/4)
FRANCES HA 12:45, 5:25, 9:45
BEFORE MIDNIGHT
12:10, 2:35, 4:30, 7:40, 10:10
FROM UP ON POPPY HILL
(Fri, 6/28: 10:00 pm only)
SAT-THURS: 12:15, 2:20, 10:00
RENOIR 12:00, 5:15, 7:45
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QUARTET 7:20	SIDE EFFECTS 9:05	JACK THE GIANT SLAYER 9:05

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