

HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

Red Cane makes Much Ado about the red, white and blue

The plays of Shakespeare are infinitely flexible, capable of being transported across time to various historic eras and transplanted into soils that are vastly different than those originally intended. Some adaptations work splendidly, others not so much: I've seen the Bard by turns relocated to late-20th-century Venice Beach, wedged wickedly into Nazi Germany and, not too long ago, given the hipster goose of modern Manhattan.

But Shakespeare's beloved comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* set amidst the doo-wop din of the U.S. as soldiers return home from the Second World War? Yes — such is the vision created by Red Cane Theatre director Mary Huls, who turns this romantic meditation on love, fidelity, betrayal and politics into a frolicsome bit of musical theater, complete with tap numbers, Big Band revelry and the nostalgic triumphalism of military victory. To a surprising degree it works, thanks largely to the esprit de corps of the Phoenix Players, the young troupe of talented actors Huls has cultivated over the past half-decade or so.

Any misgivings one might have about Rat Packing the Bard are quickly steamrolled by the sheer delight of the production's opening scene, as the cast takes the stage for a boogie-woogie dance that sets a tone of *Glee*-full shenanigans. It's a deft move: Rather than being cowed by the rhythmic rigors of iambic pentameter, Huls and crew give the cadences of Shakespeare's wry, sexy language a



DAVID ANGIER AND LIZZ TORRECILLAS IN *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*

PHOTO COURTESY OF RED CANE THEATRE

kind of be-bop snap that sounds at once quaint and contemporary.

It helps that the cast — so steeped in the bouncy stuff of musical theater — appears completely comfortable with the depth of Shakespeare's wit and the impacted innuendos of his comic verbiage. These young actors are up to the task, and they execute performances that are damn near athletic in demand. As Claudio and Hero, the smitten central characters whose matrimony is jeopardized by bitter, devious Don John (the excellent DJ Luna), David Angier and Lizz Torrecillas are charming; Torrecillas, in particular, is beginning to distinguish herself as a strong

vocalist and graceful actor. And as the hilariously feuding lovebirds Beatrice and Benedick, Amanda and Austin Lawrence are just right, giving full feeling to the sultry sideswipes of romantic comedy. It's fun to watch this married couple pretend mutual distaste.

Much Ado is one of the stronger productions Red Cane has mounted of late. The risk of fusing classic Elizabethan rom-com and the pop lust of mid-century American pays off, creating a hybrid show that is steeped in a distinctly American sentimentality for the simpler things — like *Happy Days* for highbrows. ■

Much Ado About Nothing runs through Sept. 19 at The Red Cane Theatre.



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