



Under the direction of May Adrales, *Vietgone* is a fast-paced and accessible play. James Ryen embodies the youth, anger and excitement of Quang. Jeena Yi is sharp as Tong. Will Dao, Amy Kim Waschke and Paco Tolson encircle the production as various characters with energy and purpose.

We are told from the start that this play is a love story, but it's more than just the tale of displaced-fiery-Vietnamese-woman-meets-married-helicopter-pilot-who-can-never-step-foot-in-South-Vietnam-again. It's about the messy love between parents and children. It's about love for a country left behind, and the romance of adapting to a new one. It's about love for burritos and the love for the Americans who helped fight a war that has turned out to be wildly unpopular.

The production is beautiful. Nguyen weaves so much into this short and unpredictable play. If you don't mind raw language and extremely casual sex, this is a bracing modern play.

THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD

The theater is a swarming pit of activity. Audience members fill the stage, throwing horseshoes, shooting pool, drinking at the open bar. Actors with a variety of instruments wander the stage, singing classic Johnny Cash songs or a countrified version of Prince's "Kiss." By the time the play starts, a good chunk of the audience is still on stage, where they are encouraged to join in the fun as they see fit.

The Yeomen of the Guard is insane — a crazy, noisy, funny interpretation of Gilbert and Sullivan's 1888 operetta. If the original 19th-century authors are rolling in their graves, it's because they're laughing hilariously at this re-imagining of their work.

Sean Graney, Andra Velis Simon and Matt Kahler's adaptation retains the smarts of the original while opening up the script to modern nuances. The music is mostly fun and silly, though a couple numbers are achingly beautiful.

Britney Simpson shines in the dual roles of Phoebe and crazy Kate. The antics, voice and expressive face grab and keep a tight hold in this mad setting. Michael Sharon is as endearing as he is revolting in the part of Shadbolt the Jailor. Kate Hurster and Leah Anderson are charming as the Point Sisters.

Know your limits for goofiness before you buy your tickets. Proscenium seating means that audience members who have dreamt of shining onstage finally get their chance, and the folks in the seats can't help but watch them.

This play can feel like observing a smashed anthill, where all the ants are aspiring vaudeville actors.

The Yeomen of the Guard is really fun, and proscenium seating would be a great gift for the ham in your life. It exceeded my goofy tolerance, but was so well done it was a pleasure regardless.

TWELFTH NIGHT

Twelfth Night is this year's crowd-pleasing Shakespeare offering. Busloads of students wash up on the bricks at Ashland every year, along with erudite 80-year-olds who have invested considerable thought and money into their weeklong trip.

Although it's not exactly fair to call the students groundlings (I have never seen a middle-schooler pelt any one with a piece of rotten fruit) and not every adult who attends OSF is a theater scholar, the festival finds itself in much the same predicament as Shakespeare. How does it stage an intellectually stimulating production for learned patrons while at the same time keeping things engaging and fun enough for those who might not get every last classical allusion?

Shakespeare, like OSF, had to pack the house, and if that meant allowing Will Kemp to run amok in the middle of history for longer than was strictly necessary, so be it. At OSF, if a character needs to dab to keep it fresh, he goes for it.

Director Christopher Liam Moore is no stranger to bending Shakespeare to a particular vision. This time he sets *Twelfth Night* in 1930s Hollywood. He adds a prologue to clarify the situation, and then assigns characters a job in Illyria Studios (Toby Belch is a former silent film star, Orsino becomes the German immigrant head of Illyria Studios.)

The gender fluidity and homosexual themes of *Twelfth Night* have always been there, though played in the new light of today's expanding LGBTQA awareness, the work feels completely of the moment.

In most productions of *Twelfth Night*, the twins Sebastian and Viola look somewhat alike and are dressed alike, and we all agree to pretend we can't tell the difference. Moore gave Sara Bruner the challenge of both roles. It was a pleasure to watch her delve into the complexity of Viola and also to portray the open ease of Sebastian. Gina Daniels channels a 1930s film star to perfection as Olivia. Ted Deasy turns in a satisfying Malvolio.

This comedy, at times excruciatingly sad, is my favorite Shakespeare play. *Twelfth Night* reveals something new with every production. I recommend OSF's current production for anyone, save the most extreme purist.

The 2016 OSF season is in full swing. As summer comes to an end, audiences can also check out *Hamlet*, *The Wiz*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Richard II* and *Timon of Athens*, along with the continued run of *Great Expectations*.

From reexamined history to reimagined classics, the parallels among the plays are noteworthy. Look for characters left lonely at the end and for a world shifted in a moment, and enjoy coming to your own conclusions about this year's work at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland runs through October; \$30-\$120-plus. For times, locations and tickets, visit osfashland.org or call 800-219-8161.