

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING (a romantic comedy by William Shakespeare)

Or, Love on a small stage!

We relished our evening in the garden behind the King's Arms, with a backdrop of apple trees and a refreshing drink in hand. The evening was not wet, cold or windy so we settled comfortably to enjoy the recent Rotherfield Players' production.

If you have never seen or studied this play, or have forgotten the plot, basically it's the one where Claudio falls in love with Hero and their marriage is agreed upon; but Beatrice and Benedick despise love and continually engage in witty banter. The others conspire to make them fall in love with each other, by a trick in which Benedick will overhear his friends talking of Beatrice's supposed secret love for him and vice versa. Later Claudio has jealous doubts about his betrothed lady, resulting from a hoax instigated by Don John... But it all comes right in the end!

There was a large cast (several of them new to the Rotherfield Players) and all performed very well; perhaps too many to mention all of the Players here. Most memorable for this reviewer perhaps were Leonato (Leonata, a widow in this version) ably played with an authoritative air by Emma Harrison; Darren Thomas as Benedick and Olie Jeffries as Claudio, revealing a range of changing emotions; Victoria Field as Don John (or rather, wily Donna Joan in this rendering); not forgetting the charming young Amy Gambrill as Hero the heroine. The comic turn was amusing - led by Dogberry played here by Barbara Winter and aided by other lady constables of the watch they employed a certain amount of slapstick to counter tense moments of the drama.

Music and dancing were well rehearsed; the scenery was relatively simple but just right for outdoors and apparently was replicated in the Memorial Institute for the two evenings when forecast weather conditions did not permit an open air performance. Kate Organ is to be congratulated on a very polished production; sound and lighting could not be faulted and the attractive costumes were mostly 1920's style, the setting being Italy in the twenties.

The next production will be the Panto in Jan 2024 : Beauty and the Beast.