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# Trinity's As You Like It suffers from too many good things

June 12, 2011

3:38 AM MST



Trisha Miller as Rosalind and Jonathan Brooks as Orlando  
*Amy Peterson*

## As You Like It

Rating: ★★★★★

Imagine a long table laid out with all your favorite deserts, each one delicious, each prepared to perfection. Now imagine having to eat them all at once. Such is the case with Trinity Shakespeare Festival's production of *As You Like It*, which is saturated in such richness it struggles to find the main course. Individually each element could not have been better realized. Collectively they don't quite gel, lacking that central cohesion that unites them into a whole. As a result *As You Like It* seems confused in its aspirations with performances and production locking horns in a battle for the audience's attention.

The battlefield in question is Shakespeare's story of Rosalind, passionately in love with Orlando, who is banished by the usurping Duke Fredrick. Fleeing to the forest with her friend, Duke

Fredrick's daughter Celia, and their servant Touchstone, the two girls assume new identities as brother and sister, with Rosalind disguising herself as a man. Complications arrive in the form of Orlando, who has also taken refuge in the forest following a threat on his life by his brother Oliver. There he meets the rightful Duke Ferdinand and his party and settles down to exile, declaring his love for Rosalind by posting love poems on the branches of trees. Seeing an opportunity to test his love, the disguised Rosalind challenges him to prove his love by showing how he would woo this woman he claims to adore. Further complications arise in the shape of Phebe and her adoring shepherd Silvius, and Orlando's brother Oliver who comes to seek him out. Ultimately this convoluted comedy weaves its way through a labyrinth of misunderstandings, finally coming to a happy end in which all is revealed and all that is love is celebrated.

The action occurs against a sumptuous set design that strives to be too many things at once. The tall, grey trees that dominate the sides of the stage, reaching out past the proscenium, are wonderfully realized, as is the large picture frame behind them into which various scenes of the moon, the forest and varying shades of color are projected. Together though, they cancel each other out, with the forest obscuring part of the frame and the frame distracting from the forest. This isn't helped by the impressionistic use of color which not only fills the frame, but spills over outside it. Costumes too, though beautifully constructed, also add to the sense of confusion. Evoking a Victorian melodrama, a Parisian dancehall, a 1920's English hunting party, each, though crafted to perfection, looked like lost characters looking for a context. Similarly with the musical score, which lacked a thematic sense of cohesion. The overwhelming feeling was one of no central decision maker deciding what should, and should not, be on the menu.

If the production values distract from this enjoyable romp, some strong performances manage to save the day. Jonathan Brooks' lovelorn Orlando is terrifically engaging, as is Elizabeth Mason's Celia, whose effervescent presence sparkles throughout. David Coffee provides much of the laughs as Touchstone, giving what is essentially a W.C. Fields impression, and his song and dance routine feels like a moment of genius. Jackie Cabe's cynical Jaques is utterly engaging in what is a wonderfully nuanced performance. Alex Organ's is also splendid as the imposing and dangerous Oliver who becomes all sweetness and light upon discovering love and brotherhood in the forest. Supporting cast also bring some vital energy and depth in the shape of Brandon Sterrett as the heartless Duke Fredrick, Kelsey Melbourn as the delightful Phebe, Gabriel Whitehurst as the hopeless Silvius, Morgan McClure as the lusty Audrey, Richard Haratine as Duke Fredrick and Tim Hystad as the faithful Adam. Yet at the heart of this production is Trisha Miller's spellbinding Rosalind in what is without argument one of the finest performances of the year. Miller is flawless and her breathtaking Rosalind flows from the stage, over the audience and embraces them with its charm, humor and passion.

Director T.J. Walsh makes some excellent casting choices, shows a wonderful understanding of Shakespeare's script and elicits some powerful performances. But the production lacked that central thread that should have tied everything together. Still, there is much to enjoy in *As You Like It* and performances alone are well worth the price of admission.

*As You Like It* runs at the Hay's Theatre, TCU Campus, [Fort Worth](#), as part of the Trinity

Shakespeare Festival, June 12th – June 26th.

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