UC Merced

UC Merced Previously Published Works

Title

As You Like It by Santa Cruz Shakespeare, and: Merry Wives of Windsor by Santa Cruz Shakespeare

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2sf083p5>

Journal

Shakespeare Bulletin, 33(1)

Author

Brokaw, Katherine Steele

Publication Date

2015

DOI

10.1353/shb.2015.0000

Peer reviewed

PROJECT MUSE®

As You Like It by Santa Cruz Shakespeare, and: Merry Wives of Windsor by Santa Cruz Shakespeare (review)

Katherine Steele Brokaw

Shakespeare Bulletin, Volume 33, Number 1, March 2015, pp. 129-135
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

➔ For additional information about this article
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/shb/summary/v033/33.1.brokaw.html>

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

As You Like It

Presented by **Santa Cruz Shakespeare** at the **Sinsheimer-Stanley Festival Glen**, Santa Cruz, California. July 1–August 10, 2014. Directed by Mark Rucker. Sets by Michael Ganio. Costumes by B. Modern. Lights by Kent Dorsey. Sound composition and design by Jeff Mockus. With Brandon Blum (Amiens), Marcus Cato (Adam), Carly Cioffi (Phebe), Julia Coffey (Rosalind), William Elsmann (Silvius), Dan Flapper (Orlando), Allen Gilmore (Jaques), Mark Anderson Phillips (Oliver), Neiry Rojo (Audrey), Mike Ryan (Touchstone), Kit Wilder (Corin), Greta Wohlrabe (Celia), and Richard Ziman (Dukes Frederick and Senior).

Merry Wives of Windsor

Presented by **Santa Cruz Shakespeare** at the **Sinsheimer-Stanley Festival Glen**, Santa Cruz, California. July 13–August 10, 2014. Directed by Kirsten Brandt. Sets by Eric Barker. Costumes by B. Modern. Lights by Kent Dorsey. Sound composition and design by Jeff Mockus. With Brandon Blum (Rugby), Marcus Cato (Shallow), Carly Cioffi (Mistress Quickly), Julia Coffey (Mistress Ford), William Elsmann (Caius), Dan Flapper (Slender), Allen Gilmore (Page), Maribel Martinez (Anne), Mark Anderson Phillips (Ford), Neiry Rojo (Host), Kit Wilder (Sir Hugh Evans), Greta Wohlrabe (Mistress Page), and Richard Ziman (Falstaff).

KATHERINE STEELE BROKAW, *University of California, Merced*

Santa Cruz Shakespeare (SCS), the festival that arose from the ashes of Shakespeare Santa Cruz (SSC), performed two comedies for its inaugural season. In December 2013, University of California-Santa Cruz pulled the plug and stopped funding the former festival, which had been running since 1981. Supporters both local and distant sprung into action, and a campaign raised \$1.1 million in three months to establish the independent, forward-funding SCS: they were able to fund the first season on the money raised, and all profits from the inaugural season will go toward funding season two. The new company line-up features many of the same administrators, directors, actors, and designers as SSC; but with a restructured financial model, the support of new advisory board members Sir Patrick Stewart and Olympia Dukakis, and a freer rehearsal

schedule without the restrictions of the UCSC academic calendar, it seems that better times are ahead for Shakespeare in this coastal town. Certainly the new company's first two productions bode well.

Even a sub-par performance would make for a pleasant evening in a space as beautiful as the Glen, erected as it is in a majestic grove of redwood trees, but these shows were delightful pieces of theater. With an eye to the budget, the scenic designers exploited the gorgeous surroundings as much as possible: it's useful to have the forest of Arden played by ancient trees (six even grow on stage). The rest of the *As You Like It* set featured leaves painted on doors and floors, and alternating black and white banners for the court scenes. The mid-nineteenth-century American setting was primarily evoked through costumes: Arden, in this case, was a sort of Walden, its visitors Thoreauvians returning to nature in order to escape the industrialized world and antebellum manners.

An effervescent Celia (Greta Wohlrabe) dominated the opening scenes, leaving Rosalind—looking dour and uncomfortable in a black corseted dress—very much in her shadow (it was hard to believe Duke Frederick was worried about his daughter getting outshone by her cousin). Wohlrabe's exuberance, comic timing, husky voice, and bright looks made her the clear star of the entire production. For example, Celia's suggestion to give herself the clunky name "Aliena" got far more laughs than Rosalind's "suit me all points like a man" speech (1.3.122, 1.3.110). As Celia and also as Mistress Page, Wohlrabe pulled off that tricky balance between sounding colloquially modern and having command over Shakespearean meter and diction. Though Coffey's Rosalind was far more engaging once she became Ganymede, she never quite matched the winning charm of Wohlrabe (Fig. 1).

Dan Flapper made a worthy Orlando: he was determined and self-assured. Snappy direction made the opening moments between the lovers suitably awkward. That sparky, awkward chemistry between the two was again on display in the "woo me" scene, which digressed into the "boys" hitting each other. In the forest, Coffey pulled off the requisite sexy boyishness with a rakish haircut, jeans, and a vest. There were moments—for example in her comically long series of questions for Celia about Orlando's presence in the forest—when her energy was infectious; I found myself wondering where that zest was in some other scenes. Comedy needn't be the only goal of an actor, but Coffey missed several potential laughs (of which I was especially aware, having myself played the role a year previously); sometimes the delivery was too fast, sometimes the necessary verve was a little lacking. She was certainly a deft speaker

Fig. 1. Greta Wohlrabe as Celia, Julia Coffey as Rosalind/Ganymede, and Mike Ryan as Touchstone in Santa Cruz Shakespeare's 2014 production of *As You Like It*, directed by Mark Rucker. Photo courtesy of R.R. Jones.

of the language and a sympathetic Rosalind, but Wohlrabe's magnetic, goofy, agile Celia will linger longer in my memory.

Richard Ziman as the Dukes and Allen Gilmore as Jaques got a mixture of raves and rants from local reviewers; I found them both quite strong. Ziman was by turns frighteningly authoritarian and transcendently relaxed as the contrasting brothers. Gilmore's charismatic delivery of the "All the world's a stage" speech acknowledged its narratological randomness, yet seemed to have been clearly inspired by Touchstone, by whom this Jaques appeared genuinely moved. Gilmore's Jaques was captivating in his turns at peevishness and wonder. Co-artistic director of SCS Mike Ryan, donning a bowler hat and mismatched plaid, struck the perfect balance between clownishness and sagacity as Touchstone. Kit Wilder's Corin, a long-haired nineteenth-century hippie in sheepskin and cowboy boots, matched the energy and stage prowess of his courtly foe, though I would have liked to have seen more wariness and less naive stupidity in the old shepherd.

This production staged the death of a competent, if not believably frail, Adam (Marcus Cato) after he partook of Duke Senior's food. The servant was carried off to the tune of "Hard Times Come Again No More" right before intermission: a choice that was almost, but not entirely, moving. The live Americana string music performed throughout the production was well composed and delivered, full of unexpected rhythms and knee slapping; led by Amiens (Brandon Blum), the singers managed to make their obviously well rehearsed harmonies sound spontaneous. Live or recorded music was used to mark scene transitions far more in the second half of the play than in the first, which would have benefited from more musical cues. William Elsmar's Silvius was a weaker link: he was noticeably an actor acting and therefore one never believed his love for Phebe, played with vigor by Carly Cioffi. Neiry Rojo's Audrey was also problematic, painted in broad "dumb girl" strokes with a questionable speech impediment. However, Oliver (Mark Anderson Phillips) made his narrative about the lioness a highlight of the show: he elevated the small but dynamic role, and in the end seemed an admirable match for this superlative Celia.

While the company's performances in *As You Like It* were something of a mixed bag, the cast was almost uniformly strong in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which also boasted superior direction and production values. To the set were added brightly colored stand-alone door frames that moved around on wheels and created energetic farce when the doors slammed or spun on their hinges, sometimes bopping people in the face. Set in the 1920s, the production featured flapper dresses, cloche hats, and gorgeous suits in a visual feast, and the audience delighted in the anachronistic insertion of tunes like "I Wanna Be Loved By You." In this *Merry Wives*, Falstaff was a furloughed World War One soldier easily able to find and create jazzy, boozy trouble in Windsor.

While there was some indicating (overly literal gesture) on the part of the actors and a few too many penis jokes for my taste, on the whole Kirsten Brandt's direction was clever and sharp. Brandt pulled out of her actors exactly what is needed to make this silly play sparkle; they delivered the required dexterity, physical stamina, and vocal quickness. Dramatic freezes, crisp and rapid blocking, nimble dancing and fighting, and actually enjoyable audience interaction (especially banter with women during the horns scene) kept the show humming along from start to finish.

Fig. 2. Julia Coffey as Mistress Ford and Richard Ziman as Falstaff in Santa Cruz Shakespeare's 2014 production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, directed by Kirsten Brandt. Photo courtesy of Jana Marcus.

There was entrance applause for Richard Ziman's Falstaff (the actor had played the parallel parts in Shakespeare Santa Cruz's *Henry IVs* in 2011 and 2012), and deservedly so, for he filled the role in every way possible. Wearing a red British army uniform and pith helmet, cigar and pool cues in hand, he took the stage and never let go. It was a master class in comic acting: as his considerable frame gracefully pranced around the stage and in and out of laundry baskets, his mischievous grins and pitch-perfect line delivery made him everything one could desire in a Falstaff (Fig. 2). He had the audience so much on his side that when he revealed his plan to woo Mistresses Ford and Page for their money, his winking "they shall be exchequers to me" got enthusiastic applause (1.3.60–61). He managed a twinge of pathos, too: just enough that the audience felt bad for laughing at him when he was pulled out of the river, though the hilarious romper the costume team fashioned for him to wear in that scene deserves a prize.

The Mistresses Ford and Page made fetching versions of Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker in their summer frocks. Both women were charming enough to be loved by Falstaff, and wise enough to fool him. Again Wohlrabe was especially wonderful: in a bobbed brown wig, and

at times in dark glasses and holding a Bloody Mary, she was believably middle-aged yet buoyant. Ford (Mark Anderson Phillips) really managed to sound like a '20s movie star at times, and his jealousy was both plausible and hilarious; his scene with Falstaff was perhaps the funniest of all in a very funny show. There was a real sweetness to Phillips's Ford when he knelt in apology to his wife, who accepted his contrition with a long kiss. Allen Gilmore made a dapper Page, playing well off a sharply comic trio of Shallow (Marcus Cato), Slender (Dan Flapper), and Evans (Kit Wilder) in their argyle and knickers (in their first scene, they even put a little putting green on stage). Wilder gets the award for being most transformed between repertory shows: his vivacious and quirky Welsh parson showed nothing of the dimwitted Corin, and his singing and dancing to "Singing in the Rain" was a big hit with the audience. William Elsmann brought another keen ear for accents to Caius. Clad in a fabulous turquoise and yellow striped vest, he managed to make the somewhat tired cliché of the gesticulating, self-important Frenchman feel fresh.

SCS continued the SSC tradition of using college-age interns for minor roles. The future looks bright for Brandon Blum and Maribel Martinez (Rugby and Anne), who both managed to be sympathetic and zany despite being so young and good-looking. The show's small children, however, added very little to the overall production, and their biggest scene—the fairy sequence—felt overly long and out of place, especially with its bizarre music that sounded nothing like the 1920s tunes used everywhere else.

A quibble about both productions was their long run times (each clocked in around three and a half hours). That gorgeous Glen gets very chilly, and both would have benefited from more cutting. There's no reason to keep the word "Ethiophe" in *As You Like It*, and even the best actors can usually benefit from a few cuts to longer speeches. SCS boasts a massive dramaturgical team, and it was clear that the actors understood every allusion, pun, and nuance, but thoroughness needn't be the goal of this charming local festival.

Santa Cruz has much to celebrate. In dire circumstances, the community banded together to create a new Shakespeare festival, and their inaugural season boasted two productions that demonstrated it was worth the effort. Always adequate and often stellar acting, subtle lighting, and gorgeous costuming (though much was borrowed and not built) more than made up for a tight scenic budget. The fresh, if not groundbreaking, settings of comedies were a hit with local reviewers and the audiences,

who sold out several performances. Shakespeare in Santa Cruz has been resurrected, and long may it live.

Titus Andronicus

Presented by **Teatr Polski**, Wrocław and **Staatsschauspiel**, Dresden, at **Teatr Wybrzeże**, Gdańsk as part of the International Shakespeare Festival, Poland. August 3, 2013. Directed by Jan Klata. Set and lighting design Justina Lagowska. Costumes by Justina Lagowska and Mateusz Stępnia. Video-subtitles by Lorenz Schuster and Agnieszka Fietz. Choreography by Maćko Prusak. Dramaturgy by Ole Georg Graf and Piotr Rudzki from translations of *Titus Andronicus* into Polish by Maciej Słomczyński's and Wolf von Baudissin into German, and fragments from Heiner Müller's *Anatomy Titus Fall of Rome: A Shakespeare Commentary* in German, and in a Polish version by Monika Muskała. With Paulina Chapko (Lavinia), Sascha Göpel (Quintus/Captain), Stefko Hanushevsky (Saturninus), Robert Höller (Lucius), Matthias Luckey (Bassianus/Aemilius), Michał Majnicz (Demetrius), Wolfgang Michalek (Titus Andronicus), Michał Mrozek (Alarbus), Marcin Pempuś (Chiron), Torsten Ranft (Marcus), Ewa Skibińska (Tamora), and Wojciech Ziemiański (Aaron).

Titus Andronicus

Presented by **Hiraeth Artistic Productions** at **Arcola Theatre**, London, England. October 9–26, 2013. Directed and produced by Zoé Ford. Design by Nadia Malik. Lighting design by Jack Weir. Sound design by Ella Wahlström. Fight direction by Marty August. Stage management by Sinead Pounder. With Rosalind Blessed (Tamora), Stanley J. Browne (Aaron), James Clifford (Demetrius), Ryan Cloud (Bassianus), Christopher Cohen (Martius/Nurse), Pip Gladwin (Saturninus), Michael Hanratty (Little Lucius), David Vaughn Knight (Titus Andronicus), Adam Lawrence (Chiron), David McLaughlin (Alarbus/Messenger), Liam Mulvey (Marcus Andronicus), Maya Thomas (Lavinia), and James Utechin (Lucius).

NICOLETA CINPOEȘ, *University of Worcester*

After sporadic appearances in European theaters since its 1590s premiere, *Titus Andronicus* has recently made a spectacular return on both mainstream and fringe stages. It is not coincidental that Shakespeare's gory tragedy of revenge has lately shared the stage in the UK with its contemporary, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (Lazarus Theatre Company), while on the continent it has appeared alongside its twentieth-century counterpart, Heiner Müller's *Anatomy Titus Fall of Rome: A*