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Review: TheatreiNQ's The Comedy of Errors

Townsville's theatre company scores a hit with a western themed outdoor Shakespearean offering.




Sally McCutcheon as Luciana and Terri Brabon as Adriana in TheatreiNQ's rip-roarin' version of The Comedy of Errors. Photo by Chrissy Maguire.

"The Man With No Name" may not have been evidenced, but one could easily have expected him to be. And the tumbleweeds must just as well have been a blowin' down the street in what was one of the most refreshingly creative productions that is the annual Shakespearean offering from Townsville's TheatreiNQ. This time it was one of the lesser known Shakespearean comedies, *The Comedy of Errors*.

This was a production which the Bard himself would no doubt have approved of, complete with an extraordinary set reminiscent of Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*. This production was so creatively – and definitively – set in the world of the Wild West that I will be hard put to think of any other way to perform this.

One wonders why this play is so seldom performed, bearing in mind it has been adapted so many times – as an opera and three times as a musical, most famously the 1938 Rodgers and Hart musical, *The Boys from Syracuse*. The clues perhaps lie in the difficulties in the casting. There needs to be two sets of twins or actors that sufficiently resemble each other for it to be credible. Add to this the fact that there are no famous lines that are part of the lexicon – instead the only thing that enters into the realm of familiarity is the title itself: *The Comedy of Errors*.

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Put succinctly, it is an idiom which describes a humorous situation caused by a series of successive mistakes, which just about summarises the plot. With its origins steeped in the traditions of commedia dell'arte, complete with its stock characters – which are still used and clearly identifiable to this day – we have the basis for one of Shakespeare's shortest plays and possibly the only one that can be described as a full-on farce.

From the first line dance at the beginning to the boisterous square dance hoedown at the end, this production was the personification of silliness and hilarious mayhem. Director Terri Brabon, who also plays the character of Adriana, has once again assembled a dedicated and enthusiastic cast brimming with energy. She has again combined professional actors with the best of community actors (and acting) for a production which is a rollicking good fun and once again sets the bar for what can be achieved with Shakespeare.

It is all orchestrated against the western soundtrack of our movie lives – from the 'Duelling Banjos' of *Deliverance*, to the hysterical use of the William Tell Overture (used for many a B western), and just about every familiar western movie cliché there – and then some! There's even a silent movie to add to the hilarious anachronisms that make this production so definitive, and hugely enjoyable.

Then there are the two sets of twins, who, in a plot reminiscent of the corniest Gilbert and Sullivan opera, are central to the ridiculous mayhem that ensues, complete with mistaken identities, swapped babies and all the expected accompanying hysteria.

Professional actors Brendan O'Connor (Dromio of Ephesus) and Syd Brisbane (Dromio of Syracuse), played the two Dromio twins, and their matching stature, ridiculous moustaches and physical rough and tumble and buffoonery was commedia dell'arte at its best.

Then there were the the Antipholus twins, played by company actors Michael Gleeson (Syracuse) and Ron Pullman (Ephesus), who matched their Dromio counterparts with equal physicality and played with great relish.

Adriana is surely one Shakespeare's underrated female characters – indeed one never really hears about her in the lexicon of Shakespearean women. Terri Brabon's performance was a sparkling example of impeccable comic timing and played with characteristic enjoyment and infectious fun. Her hysterical speech in the second act was one of the funniest I have seen.

True to the tradition of Elizabethan theatre (and the Globe Theatre itself, past and present, would be proud to present this production), this was – above all – an ensemble piece and there wasn't single weak link in the casting. There were some gems among the ensemble, but in truth every single member of the cast contributed rounded out performances.

Once again, this was Shakespearean comedy at its best – performed outdoors, with a splendid cast, encompassed in a great concept and all wrapped up in a performance that exuded pace, energy and fun. And all delivered by one of the most exceptional – and unsung – theatre companies we have in Queensland. Would that they were seen by a broader audience, but we in Townsville appreciate that excellence on our own doorstep.

5 stars ★★★★★

The Comedy of Errors

TheatreINQ

Directed By Terri Brabon

18-30 September 2018

Queens Garden, Townsville

TREVOR KEELING

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trevor Keeling has been involved in the arts and creative industries for 40 years in Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. He has been an actor, theatre director, journalist and critic, publisher, broadcaster, music festival director, event manager and arts administrator.