

MUCH ADO ABOUT *Nothing*

April 19 thru May 21, 1994

by William Shakespeare

Indiana Repertory Theatre ★ 140 West Washington St. ★ Indianapolis, IN 46204-3465

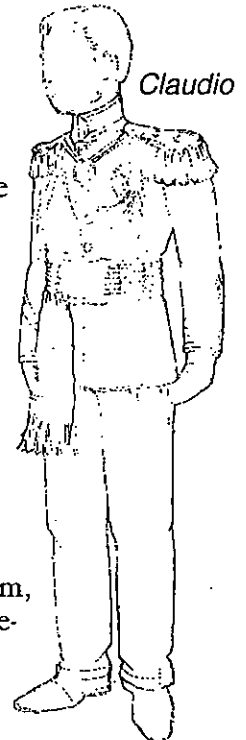
ABOUT THE PLAY

Much Ado about Nothing belongs to that genre of romantic comedies of courtship and marriage which reached a perfection of form under Shakespeare that has never been surpassed for pure enjoyment. The tone of the play is essentially light and playful, despite the mock tragic plot complications engendered by the slander against the fair Hero on the eve of her wedding to Claudio. The villains of the piece are merely spiteful rather than evil, and their unmasking has rich comic overtones. The more romantic love of Hero and Claudio provides a nice counterpoint to the reluctant and antic courtship of Beatrice and Benedick, who would rather jest than woo. *Much Ado About Nothing*, one of Shakespeare's most delightful comedies, concerns itself with nothing more than the sweet agonies and joyful absurdities of courtly love. The title tells us we have nothing to worry about: "the ado that men make up in this world" will come to naught, and a happy ending is ensured.

A SYNOPSIS

After a victorious military campaign, Don Pedro (a prince) and his men, Benedick and Claudio, visit Leonato, governor of Messina. Claudio is much taken with Leonato's daughter Hero and seeks her hand in marriage, while Leonato's niece Beatrice spars wittily with sworn bachelor Benedick. Don Pedro's brother, Don John, jealously attempts to mar Claudio's happiness by reporting that Hero is not chaste, showing him a man entering her chamber window. He does not tell him it is his own man, Borachio, visiting Hero's gentlewoman, Margaret. During the wedding ceremony

the angered Claudio accuses Hero of infidelity and refuses to marry her. Hero faints, and the family decides to report that Hero has died until they can clear up the mystery. Beatrice and Benedick, each having been tricked into believing the other is in love, finally admit their love, and Beatrice pledges Benedick to kill Claudio. During the night the comically earnest watchmen have overheard Borachio bragging of the trick and have arrested him, but it is only after the ceremony that Constable Dogberry presents his



Claudio

prisoner, who confesses the truth. A contrite Claudio mourns at Hero's tomb and swears to marry Leonato's heir, who turns out to be Hero; and even when the trick played on Beatrice and Benedick is revealed, they realize they are ideally matched and vow to wed. All ends happily as the wedding couples dance.

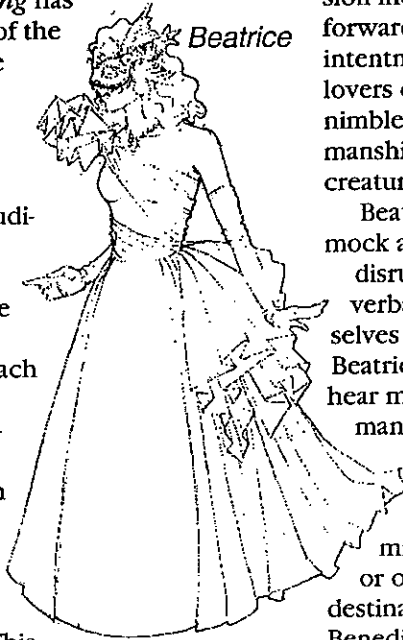


Hero

Costume design sketches by Elizabeth Novak.

The Battle between Beatrice and Benedick

In its nearly four hundred years of stage history, *Much Ado about Nothing* has proved one of the most durable plays in the Shakespeare canon. Possibly this is because audiences never tire of the delight of the battle of the sexes, and each generation finds a freshness and modernity in the merry war as waged by Beatrice and Benedick. This fascinating relationship is a play of wit between a sparkling and clever woman and a man who is fascinated by her mind no less than by her physical charms. Although this sparring of Beatrice and Benedick occupies the position of a subplot in relation to the main action of *Much Ado about Nothing*, Shakespeare lavished his major effort on the creation of those characters, and our own interest in



the play centers upon them. Whenever they are on stage, the tension increases and the spectator sits forward to listen with new intentness. The roles of the two lovers demand a high comedy style, nimble timing, and virtuoso showmanship. They are highly theatrical creatures.

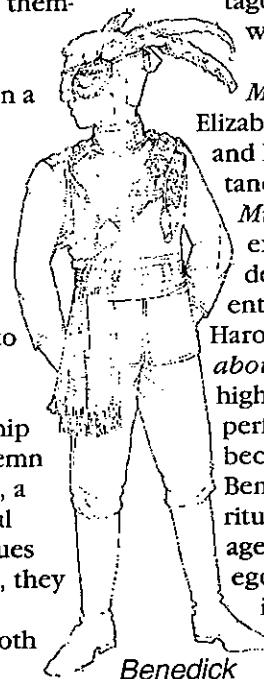
Beatrice and Benedick deliberately mock all conventionalities of speech, disrupt ceremonial occasions with verbal high-jinks, and profess themselves as enemies of love. In Beatrice's words, "I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me."

Benedick is of a similar mind: "God keep your ladyship still in that mind! so some gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate scratched face." Benedick is a professed tyrant to the opposite sex, and Beatrice, too, a confirmed "bachelor." They conceive of the relationship between the sexes not as a solemn social arrangement, but as play, a "merry war" which is the verbal equivalent of sticking out tongues and pulling pigtales. To be sure, they are fully involved in this game. They admire each other, and both use wit as a shield against too

easy a capitulation of their warm hearts to love. Moreover, their merry war is a conscious pose which they themselves and others have come to expect of them. Although they maintain loudly that they cannot stand each other, it does not require superhuman powers of perception to observe the marked interest, little short of obsession, they take in each other.

The wit combat between two protagonists of opposite sex was best exemplified in

Elizabethan drama in *Much Ado*. During the Elizabethan period, both wit and humor had equal importance in the drama, and in *Much Ado* Shakespeare exemplified in a high degree both forms of entertainment. To quote Harold Bloom, "*Much Ado about Nothing* generates its highest humor, properly performed, precisely because Beatrice and Benedick understand their rituals all too well. Nor will age wither their youthful egotism; mutually supportive, it will last out their lives together."

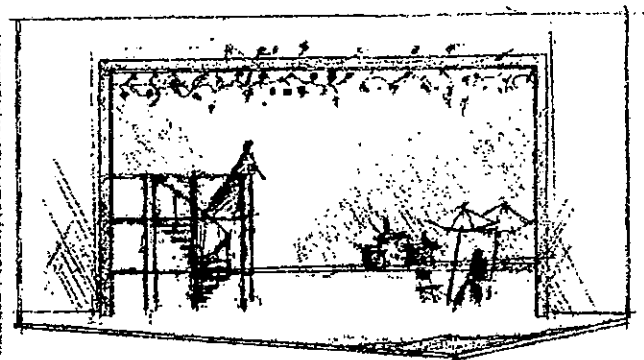


About Our Production

According to Artistic Director Libby Appel, the world created in the IRT's production of *Much Ado about Nothing* will be a privileged one full of old-world charm and sophistication, reminiscent of days gone by. Although full of historic references, this production will not be a period piece. You will not see the typical Elizabethan tights and ruffs. The play will be a celebration of love and wit set in a timeless period and an unspecified place of elegance, glamour, and wealth—a world in which we all have dreamed of living. The estate of Leonato, where the play is set, will have an atmosphere reminiscent of Nice or Cannes or any other fabulous resort where the rich escape for relaxation and romance.

When you walk into the theatre, you will see a blue-green polished floor, perfect for dancing, which seems to float like Monet's *Waterlilies*. The atmosphere will put you in mind of the summer romances you've always dreamed of having. The costumes will remind you of garden parties, parades, proms, and weddings—events from your own life as well as ones from long ago. The dance and music will be sweeping and lively.

Most of all, it will be an inviting, charming world of handsome soldiers and beautiful women who will make you laugh and long to be up there playing with them.



Scenic design sketch by Loy Arcenas.

The Many Shades of *Much Ado about Nothing*

The Indiana Repertory Theatre is committed to producing quality live theatre which reflects the dynamic, multicultural world in which we live. The most visible sign of this commitment may be found on our stages. The live theatre experience gives us the opportunity to see ourselves on stage through characters, stories and situations. Our efforts to reflect our community onstage create an opportunity for ownership by all.

As advocates of non-traditional casting, we seek to increase opportunity for actors of color. By engaging artists of culturally diverse backgrounds, we expand our ongoing pursuit of artistic excellence. We believe this mixture of backgrounds and viewpoints creates a rich and stimulating environment which enhances our work as artists in the theatre and in our community.

The timeless, universal writing of William Shakespeare lends itself beautifully to the casting of actors of color to portray characters that may in the past have been played only by white actors. We believe this process adds a freshness to the production and enriches the artistic process by expanding the experiences from which each artist draws to achieve the finished product.

In IRT's production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, the Prince,

Don Pedro, will be played by Keith Grant, an African-American actor, and his brother, Don John, will be

These types of family match-ups may, at first, seem unusual to the audience member, because these images don't conform to what we accept as reality. As the play progresses and knowledge about the characters grows, however, these differences become easier to accept.

Shakespeare's plays work particularly well for this type of casting because they are not meant to be a picture of reality; rather, they are meant to be metaphoric.

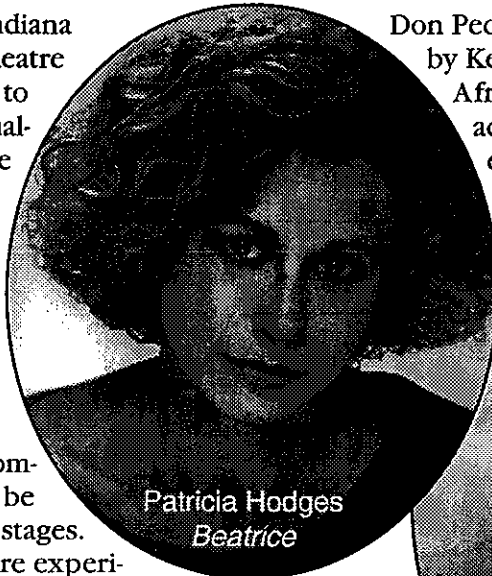
Multicultural or non-traditional casting encourages us to

played by Brian Dykstra, a white actor. Tess Lina, an Asian-American, will play Hero, but other members of her family, such as her cousin Beatrice, played by Patricia Hodges, will be portrayed by white actors. Part of the motivation

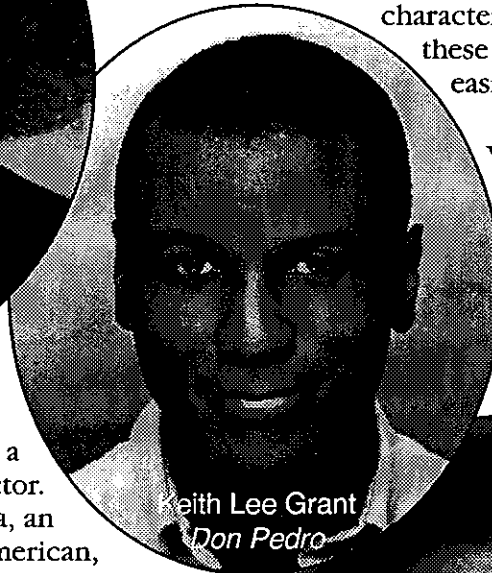
for this casting procedure is to cast the best actor for the role, regardless of color.

expand our vision of the world in which we live, open up to new possibilities, and accept new situations.

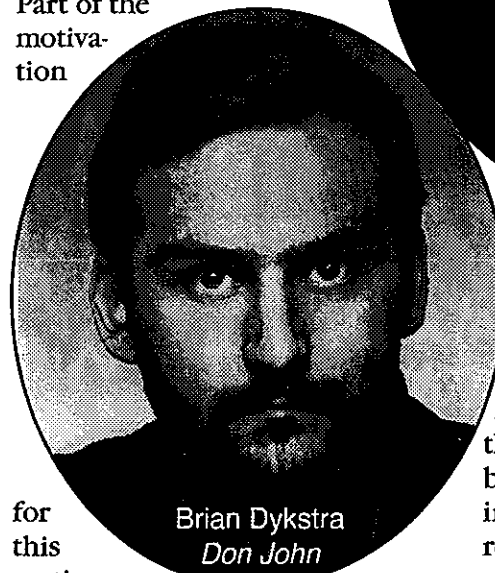
The many shades of our production of *Much Ado about Nothing* will colorfully unlock the magic of live theatre and bring us one step closer to fulfilling our mission to reflect and represent our multicultural community on our stages.



Patricia Hodges
Beatrice



Keith Lee Grant
Don Pedro



Brian Dykstra
Don John



Tess Lina
Hero

Shakespeare: A Biography

Until recently, little was known about the man from Stratford who wrote the 37 plays we know as the Shakespearean canon. Recent research and new, more thorough documentation have provided a startlingly vivid portrait of this man who soared across the panorama of Elizabethan England. In fact, Shakespeare's life has been one of the easiest to emerge from this time period.

He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a Warwickshire market town, on April 23, 1564. His father, was a businessman in the wool and leather trades who became High Bailiff of Stratford, a position similar to that of mayor. Will, his eldest son, grew up with five siblings in a middle-class family of good local repute.

At 18 years of age Will married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. Six months later, their daughter Susanna was born. They would have twins later, but the male twin Hamnet (another form of the name Hamlet) would die at the age of ten, leaving his sister Judith behind. These early married years found Will working for his father and developing a lifelong concern with his family's social standing: later in life he would acquire a coat-of-arms and the title of Gentleman, long coveted by his father.

In the early 1590s, Will left his rural country life and

immersed himself in the bustle of London's theatre scene, where he began his career as a playwright. Between seasons, he returned to his family in Stratford and worked on his second career, that of landowner and businessman. By 1594, Shakespeare had a share in the new Globe theatre, most

likely given to him as a gift from the Earl of Southampton, a patron who was the subject of many of Shakespeare's early sonnets.

(When plague periodically closed the theatres in London, he wrote sonnets and epic poetry as a means of making extra money.)

By the turn of the century, William Shakespeare was a dramatic force to be reckoned with, having penned *Richard III*,

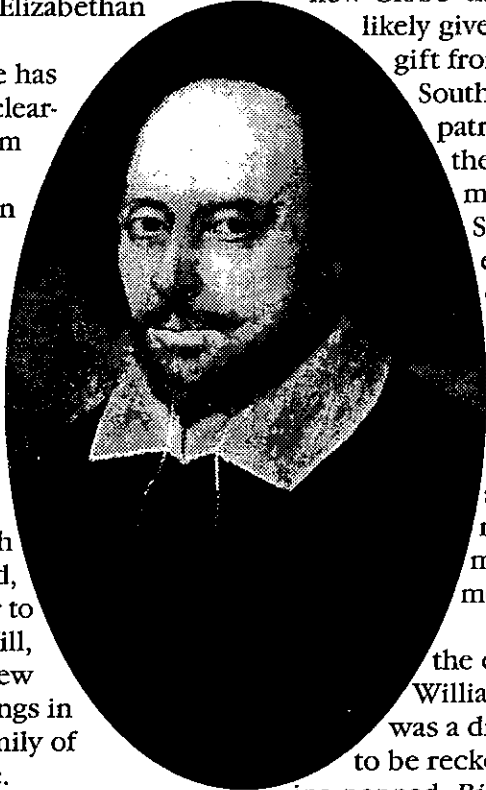
Romeo and Juliet, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Julius Caesar*, to name a few. The first decade of the 1600s would witness *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. In 1603, Queen Elizabeth died, and her cousin James I was put on the throne. In 1604, Shakespeare's company became the King's Men.

Shakespeare's plays, timeless and universal, nonetheless had a great deal to do with the politics of his own time. His private life was a blend of tavern and court, theatre and business. His audience was a blend, too. Royalty would purchase the expensive seats in the upper stalls of the

Globe, while the flat, earthen area below the stage was the territory of the "groundlings," students and the lower classes. Shakespeare was a man who moved freely in both worlds.

Time, perhaps the major theme in all of Shakespeare's plays, was kind to this poet, and by 1612 he had retired to his hometown of Stratford, where he had purchased an estate called New Place. Famous, wealthy, and respected, he had become a Gentleman and a scholar. He died on his birthday, April 23, 1616, at the age of 52, and was buried in Stratford, where his grave remains today.

Seven years after his death, John Heminge and Henry Condell, colleagues in the theatre, collected Shakespeare's plays and published the First Folio, a restored and corrected version of his complete works. During his lifetime, Shakespeare had never published his own plays, being more concerned with their affect on the stage. It is our good fortune that others saw fit to preserve them. The Folio, along with earlier versions of the plays, serve as a testament to some of the greatest words ever to be set down in English.



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Study guide written and compiled by Connie Oates with contributions from Libby Appel, Andrew Tsao, and Janet Allen; with special acknowledgements to Cather MacCallum of the American Conservatory Theatre.