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/ September 19, 2018

## WEST IS BEST

by Nathan Toll(<http://huxley.press/author/nathan-toll/>)



Last night, we were reminded how powerful a production can be when every member of an ensemble is equally as strong in their performance; equally as invested in the story they are telling us.

Theatre iNQ's *Shakespeare Under the Stars* in 2018 features one of The Bard's early works, *The Comedy of Errors* – and a comedy it is. Two sets of twins are separated at a young age when their boat sinks at sea – and when all four happen to be in the city of Ephesus many years later, cases of mistaken identity ensue between not just the sets of twins, but the twins and the townspeople. Don't walk in expecting the solemnness of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*: if anything, *Errors* builds on the fun of last year's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a lot more physical comedy and clever wordplay.

For those yet to venture into Queens Gardens after dark at this time of year, I urge you to change things up in 2018: because it really is Shakespeare as you've never seen it before. Theatre iNQ has transported the Greek city of Ephesus into the American Wild West complete with drawling accents, a swing-door saloon, and a bow-legged sheriff (Duke Solinus). How Theatre iNQ threads their theme into Shakespeare's work year after year always astounds me, and this year is no exception: while maintaining iambic pentameter through filthy Texan accents, set among the spaghetti western-inspired costumes and set may not sound complementary to the work of an English playwright from the 1600s, it

worked so well that I left wondering if *all* of Shakespeare's texts could do with a Western reboot.

The show featured incredible performances from company professionals: Director Terri Brabon's Adriana was a powerful force throughout the production and was cause of several outbursts of laughter – before an incredible monologue at the end of Act Two earned her a well-deserved early round of applause. Brendan O'Connor and guest professional Syd Brisbane, playing the Dromio twins, easily received the most laughter throughout the show. Both toed the line between physical and spoken humour with impeccable comedic timing. As they each bounced off the characters they shared the stage with, it was difficult to choose between empathising with them or hoping they became mixed up again to see what other sticky situations they would unwittingly land in – or how they next would be punished.

My favourite characters in Theatre iNQ's *Alice in Wonderland* were the Tweedles, so I was head over heels to see Michael Gleeson and Ron Pulman had again been paired up to play opposite each other in this, as the Antipholus twins. Despite matching costumes and facial hair, it was the actors' identical mannerisms and speech – particularly in their rare scenes together – that convinced the audience they were twins.



*Michael Gleeson and Syd Brisbane as Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse.*

*IMAGE: Chrissy Maguire.*

But it was the ensemble of company actors we couldn't stop talking about after last night. Bernie Lanigan's desperate Italian goldsmith Angelo, who went red in the face convincing the officer he wasn't in the wrong; Kellie Esling's supersized seduction as Nell; Paris Walsh and Shai Regan's alluring (but definitely \*ahem\* viral) courtesans; Jacob McCarthy's dumbfounded expressions as the officer. They all had their moments, and it was clear that while one story was being told downstage, they were going about their own lives in Western Ephesus in the background. This show included a beautiful melting pot of those well-known in Townsville theatre, as well as a number of past and present The Bridge Project performers who shone equally as bright.

There were points where I caught myself leaning forward to try and hear what was happening, which is really nit-picking: it was an incredible show, with some lines delivered facing away from the audience harder to hear – but you are literally sitting there watching a show in a park, with no amplification. It's to be expected, and lines delivered this way were only ever done so during carefully directed blocking. The silent film was also difficult to focus on, which can't be helped as sunset begins getting later and later in Spring – but again, we really are nit-picking; *The Comedy of Errors* was nigh on perfect.

I will never get over the beauty of shows in Queens Gardens. Arriving at twilight, leaves falling around you, the sounds of possums and curlews adding to each scene, all just makes for a theatre experience you can't get anywhere else in Townsville. This beauty is built on by lighting designer Thomas Roach (who received his own sneaky nod in the graveyard), and a darn-tootin' set designed by Brendan O'Connor. Kathy Brabon's stylised take on period costume design was spot on, and tied everything together beautifully.

Shakespeare lover? Watch *The Comedy of Errors*. Not a Shakespeare fan? Even more reason to go: Theatre iNQ has produced a gun-slingin' farce that gives The Bard's work new light and makes it enjoyable and easy to follow for all ages (there was a young boy behind us laughing more than anyone else!). With an ensemble of actors that are second to none and a venue that will win you over from the moment you walk through the gates, you'll love every second.

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**Catch Theatre iNQ's *The Comedy of Errors* in Queens Gardens until 30 September, with tickets available [here](#).**