



### **Epsom College: Shakespeare in Love – A comic masterpiece!**

As an NSTA Representative, I had the pleasure of watching a fantastic production of *Shakespeare in Love* at Epsom College on Thursday, 5th December 2024.

*Shakespeare in Love* is a fictional story set in 1590s London, where a young Shakespeare struggles to write a new play. He falls in love with Viola, a woman who disguises herself as a man to act in his play. However, their love is doomed as Viola must marry Lord Wessex and sail to the New World. Heartbroken, Shakespeare channels their tragic romance into his new masterpiece, *Romeo and Juliet*.

The director, Damon Young (Assistant Head of Drama), reflected on the challenge of bringing the play to life, noting that the 1998 film's success stemmed from its delicate balance of comedy and romance. This subtle mix is equally vital in the stage version, requiring tremendous skill from the cast and crew to execute. Impressively, the Epsom team rose to the occasion and pulled off this balance perfectly, delivering a production that was thoroughly engaging from start to finish.

The production's design choices were outstanding, from staging to costumes and music. The well-crafted staging allowed the bustling, multi-layered narrative to unfold seamlessly. A standout element was the soundtrack, which featured modern songs transformed into instrumental medieval-style pieces. These set the tone perfectly, immersing the audience in the 16th-century setting immediately and returning as a motif during scene transitions.

Act 1 flowed beautifully, establishing the characters and setting with precision and humor. The ensemble's portrayal of Shakespeare's acclaim—punctuated by well-timed "oohs" and "ahhs"—was a delightful touch that engaged the audience immediately. The romantic chemistry between Shakespeare and Viola was electric, particularly in the pivotal scene where they fall in love, drawing the audience into their story and making their relationship entirely believable.

Act 2 maintained the high standards set by the first half, with seamless transitions and imaginative staging. The "play within a play" scene was a triumph of comic timing and over-the-top performances, allowing the supporting characters to take centre stage. Sword fights were impressively choreographed, while tender moments were handled with care and authenticity.

The comedic elements were another strength, from the scenes with the dog, to the bendy dagger and the reveal of Viola being a man. These lighthearted moments made the more dramatic scenes all the more poignant.



The cast gave uniformly excellent performances, but certain actors truly stood out. Maxim, in the role of Shakespeare, was superb. Not only did he look the part, but he also embodied the role with confidence and depth, commanding the stage effortlessly. His assured portrayal allowed supporting actors to shine and take creative risks, enhancing the production as a whole.

Annalise, as Viola, was captivating. From the moment she appeared on stage, her passion for theatre and her character's romantic longing were palpable. Her lines were beautifully delivered, convincingly portraying a character for whom we felt deep sympathy – a young woman with hopes yet constrained by the rules of the time. She skillfully navigated Viola's complex emotions, from her heartfelt love for Shakespeare to her disdain for Lord Wessex, and even her comedic moments while disguised as a man. Her performance was truly multifaceted and deeply moving. Towards the end of Act 1, during the scene where Will and Viola fall in love, both actors portrayed excellent chemistry, drawing the audience into their relationship and making their love story entirely believable.

Luke, as Christopher Marlowe, was another standout. His partnership and synchronicity with Maxim created memorable moments, particularly in the balcony scene where their comedic timing was on full display. This scene, where Marlowe assists Shakespeare in wooing Viola, was polished, entertaining, and Luke's impeccable comic timing was central to this and a joy to witness.

Supporting roles added further energy and richness to the performance. Lucy's portrayal of Queen Elizabeth was regal and commanding, with excellent line delivery, while Daniel's Lord Wessex was played with great flair, serving as the perfect foil to Shakespeare. Ollie, as the Nurse, delivered wonderfully well-timed lines in Act 2, with his comical voice leaving the audience in hysterics. James Roberts' portrayal of Juliet, particularly his portrayal of stage fright, was another example of the production's sharp direction and strong character work.

Epsom College's production of *Shakespeare in Love* was a creative, dynamic, and expertly crafted performance that excelled in balancing comedy, romance, and drama. The dedication and talent of the cast and crew were evident in every scene, including well-choreographed sword fights, tender romantic moments, and comic scenes that had everyone laughing. From the actors' nuanced portrayals to the imaginative staging and music, the production captivated its audience from beginning to end. Everyone involved should feel immensely proud of their work on this memorable theatrical achievement.

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