

# Twelfth Night

By William Shakespeare  
Directed by Stephen Burdman  
New York Classical Theatre  
97th Street and Central Park (252-4531)  
Equity showcase (closes June 29)  
Review by Doug DeVita

Alert! A roving band of Shakespearean players have taken over a northwest corner of Central Park and are running rampant with a deliciously dizzy production of *Twelfth Night*, a production that was by turns bawdy and sentimental, that captured nearly all of the play's underlying sexual ambiguities, and that was both intimately reflective and laugh-out-loud funny.

The audience entered the park at Central Park West and 97th Street and followed the actors to 100th Street as they galloped merrily through Shakespeare's gender-bending tale of mistaken identities, and turned one of the prettiest sections of the park into an Illyria of gorgeously rolling, if landlocked, hills, rocks and tree-lined vistas. (It is an unfortunate bit of timing that "The Pool," a lovely little pond at 101st Street, is under reconstruction and unavailable until this fall, negating a physical embodiment of the play's water and shorefront imagery.) The mammoth, constantly shifting playing areas were exploited with visionary skill by director Stephen Burdman, who had his performers in front of, behind, and among the audience, popping out from behind trees, jumping over rocks, and appearing above the crests of far-away hills. Being right in the middle of the action like that gave an immediacy to the proceedings that was bracing, refreshing, and completely free of the self-conscious pretension that is often found in outdoor productions.

Each performer in the cast was delightful, turning the familiar characters into true, and truly funny, human beings, and each had their moment of absolute genius. **Kristen Stewart Chase** made an endearing yet scrappy Viola, and was nicely balanced by **Patricia Marie Kelly** as a frantically feminine Olivia. Kelly's rendering of the line "How wonderful" received a richly deserved burst of laughter, matched only by the brilliant **Kurt Elftmann's** painfully funny and highly physical spin on Malvolio - to see Elftmann struggle to make a smile or trudge around in high dudgeon with the laces of his infamous yellow stockings trailing around his feet would be worth almost any price of admission - if they were charging one!

**Ed Gilmartin** made Sir Andrew Aguecheek into a lovable bumbler, **Don Mayo** was an intoxicating Sir Toby Belch, and **Patrick Disney** did a remarkable job as Fabian, replacing another performer at the last minute with smooth aplomb. When these three were joined by the endlessly energetic **Fred Berman** as Feste to perform a song in the style of a barbershop quartet, it was a moment of perfect, early-summer bliss. **Nikki Walker** was a joyously scheming Maria, **Joris Stuyck** was a coolly reserved yet sexily commanding Orsino, **Stephen Girasolo** played Sebastian with puppy-like charm, and **David Huber** was a tenderly masculine Antonio. **Ryan Tresser** filled out the cast as Valentine and the Priest, formal and officious as the former, and scene-stealingly funny as the latter.

**Andréa Huelse**, listed as the Production Designer (Frederick Law Olmstead may take some exception to that, but ... oh, never mind), provided lovely costumes with hilariously character-appropriate details: those yellow stockings peeking out from under Malvolio's cut-off tuxedo pants, Sir Toby's baby-blue-and-cream leather saddle shoes, Sir Andrew's ill-fitting multicolored jacket over white floods are just some of the highlights of the intelligence at work here.

As the sun set and the moon rose over the park, the actors faces were illuminated with strategically handheld flashlights, an ingeniously simple, practical solution that bespoke of the ingeniously simple practicality that infused the entire production, a simplicity that looks so easy to achieve and so rarely is. This *Twelfth Night* was a treat that should not be missed, for lovers of Shakespeare, for lovers of theatre, for lovers of nature, for lovers of a good time, or for lovers, period. "How wonderful," indeed.