Much Ado About Nothing

Adapted by Trish Black Melehan

From the play by William Shakespeare

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DEDICATION

For my many students:
That they may see through the eyes of a genius
That they may hear music in the poetry
That they may confront the questions of the ages
And finally ... that they enjoy the revelry.

STORY OF THE PLAY

This adaptation of "Much Ado About Nothing" is appropriate for middle school and high school students alike. It contains much of Shakespeare's original poetry and language but has added an additional female role, that of Nerissa, a gentlewoman of the court. This play, a satiric comedy about "romantic" love, features two contrasting couples. Benedick, a cad who has sworn to forever remain a bachelor, meets his match when he encounters Beatrice, a strong, intelligent, witty woman. Beatrice doesn't need a man, and she doesn't want one either. Then there is Claudio, the sappy, headstrong lover who is convinced his true love, Hero, is the purest of earthly angels. Hero is quite satisfied to have found her match; however, her trusting and naïve nature makes her vulnerable to catastrophe. It's a timeless battle of the sexes.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(8 m, 5 w, 9 flexible, extras)

DON PEDRO: Prince of Arragon.
LEONATO: Governor of Messina.
ANTONIO: Brother of Leonato, father of Beatrice.
BENEDICK: A young lord of Padua.
BEATRICE: Leonato's niece, Antonio's daughter.
CLAUDIO: A young lord of Florence.
HERO: Leonato's daughter.
MARGARET: Gentlewoman attending Hero.
URSULA: Gentlewoman attending Hero.
NERISSA: Gentlewoman of the Court.
DON JOHN: Don Pedro's villainous brother.
BORACHIO: Follower of Don John.
CONRADE: Follower of Don John.
DOGBERRY: Constable in charge of the watch.
VERGES: The parish constable, Dogberry's partner.
FIRST WATCHMAN: Assistant to Dogberry.
SECOND WATCHMAN: Assistant to Dogberry.
BALTHASAR: A singer attending Don Pedro.
FRIAR FRANCIS
SEXTON
MESSENGER
ATTENDANT
KINSMEN
REVELERS

Performance Time: About 80 minutes.

SETTING

Messina, a town in Italy. 16th century. In and around the estate of Leonato, the governor. Sets can be as elaborate as budget and time allow.

PROPS

Letter
Book
Silk handkerchief
Gloves
Bag of money
Pen and paper
Scroll
Masks, assorted

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I
Scene 1: Outside the estate, in the garden.
Scene 2: In the garden.
Scene 3: In the garden.
Scene 4: In the garden.

ACT II
Scene 1: Room in the estate.
Scene 2: Masked ball at the estate.
Scene 3: Masked ball at the estate.
Scene 4: Room in the estate.
Scene 5: In the garden or in a parlor.

ACT III
Scene 1: Outside the estate, in a garden.
Scene 2: Inside the estate.
Scene 3: At night, outside the wall of the estate.
Scene 4: Hero's dressing room.

ACT IV
Scene 1: Wedding, in the garden.
Scene 2: At night, outside the estate.
Scene 3: In the garden.
Scene 4: In the garden.
Scene 5: At Hero's tomb.
Scene 6: Wedding, in the garden.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: BEATRICE, LEONATO, and HERO are in a garden outside Leonato's estate. ENTER MESSENGER.)

MESSENGER: My Lord, Leonato, I deliver to you this message.

LEONATO: *(Taking the letter, reading.)* I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Arragon comes this night to Messina.

MESSENGER: He comes, my Lord, from the battlefield with several of his men. They were not three leagues off when I left them.

LEONATO: How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?

MESSENGER: But few of any sort and none of name.

LEONATO: Most assuredly a victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER: Much deserved on his part, and equally remembered by Don Pedro and his men. Claudio hath borne himself with valor most exceeding the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion.

BEATRICE: I pray you, is Signior Benedick "Brazen Tongue" returned from the wars or no?

MESSENGER: I do not know the name.

LEONATO: Faith, niece, you tax Signior Benedick too much, but he'll be meet with you, I doubt it not.

HERO: My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER: O, he's returned, and as pleasant as ever he was. He hath also done good service, lady, in these wars.

BEATRICE: Indeed so. And still an enemy of love I'll warrant. He is a good soldier to a lady but what is he to another soldier?

MESSENGER: A good man, my lady, stuffed with all honorable virtues.

BEATRICE: It is so indeed. He is no less than a stuffed man. No doubt it is himself that he is full of.

LEONATO: You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE: Alas! I think our war is over. After our last battle four of his five wits went limping off, and now the whole man is governed with but one, so if he wants to keep any wit at all, he should avoid future battles.

MESSENGER: I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

BEATRICE: No, an he were, I would burn my study. But I pray you, who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

MESSENGER: He is most in the company of the right honorable Claudio.

BEATRICE: O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease! He is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio! If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere 'a be cured.

(THEY move to a different location, side stage.)

(ATTENDANT ENTERS, addresses LEONATO.)

ATTENDANT: Don Pedro is approached.

(DON PEDRO ENTERS with CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR, and DON JOHN. LEONATO moves toward Don Pedro, away from group.)

DON PEDRO: Good Signior Leonato, are you come to meet your trouble? The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

LEONATO: Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your Grace, but when you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave.

DON PEDRO: You embrace your charge too willingly. I think this is your daughter.

LEONATO: Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK: Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

End of Freeview

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