

# Shakespeare's Twelfth Night Performed

by: Cindy Justis

On Nov. 11, 1989, on the main stage of Jones Auditorium at Meredith College, the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival brought to life a fairly faithful version of William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night for a capacity audience. The tale of the cruelly separated twins and the misadventures of Viola while searching for her brother remained true to much of Shakespeare's text, while still allowing the creativity of both director and actors to shine.

The setting was simple and traditional. Four moveable partitions allowed the actors to transform Count Orsino's mansion into an Illyrian street into the garden at Olivia's estate. An elaborate facade of Olivia's house and a few benches completed the set. Most entrances and exits were made from either the house or the upstage wings. Unfortunately for myself and those around me, the convenient partitions completely blocked the entire upstage area, and we missed the most important entrances and exits.

As a comedy, the play was literally a howling success. Many of our more distinguished patrons maintained a little more dignity than I did, however. The tempo was quick and sharp; nevertheless, the audience missed little of the verbal humor thanks to the clear diction and expression of the actors. The most memorable moments of the whole play were comedic ones: the entrance of the yellow-stockinged, cross-gar-

tered Malvolio (even though I couldn't see it), the mad ravings of Sir Anthony "Ague-face," and the bawdy, intelligent, humorous banter of Feste the clown. If laughter were the only goal of the production, it earned its pay many times over, especially on the row where I was sitting.

I believe that laughter was one of the most important goals of this comedy; however, I also believe that Shakespeare wanted his audience to think as well as laugh. This is where I had a few problems with this production. First of all, I was baffled by the director's decision to modernize the costumes. The men's suits and even some of the women's dresses appeared to be out of the 1920s. Both Sir Toby and Antonio wore knit sweaters. Olivia's second dress was only shin-length. The officers of Illyria looked like a cross between New York's Guardian Angels and KGB agents. Why would a production so traditional in its other elements vary in its costuming? Another problem I had was with some of the actors. Neither of the twins impressed me greatly. Viola's diction was too lofty and affected compared to the ease with which other cast members interpreted Shakespeare's lines. She also did not strike me as truly being in love with Orsino, even during her soliloquies. I must, however, give her credit for her very convincing masculine demeanor. Sebastian, her brother, came off as being very dull, wimpy, and stupid. Thus, when he

supposedly beats up Toby and Andrew, it is not believable. With such an unappealing pair as leads, I was not cheering them toward their reunion as I felt I should have been.

However, despite these few hitches, the performance was worthwhile and enjoyable due to some top-notch performances by David Snizek, Graham F. Smith, Lucius Houghton, and Allan Hickle-Edwards. Snizek portrayed Malvolio with ease and skill. We all despised him while he was a Puritan, ridiculed him while he was a fool, and pitied him while he was a laughingstock (which I wasn't sure we were supposed to do). Smith's Sir Andrew was so incredibly ludicrous that he was the perfect foil to Houghton's Bruce Willis version of Sir Toby. I did not realize just from the play how often Toby mocks and takes advantage of his witless friend. And Hickle-Edwards as Feste offers a running commentary on all the action with his biting wit and his penchant for breaking into song.

Overall, this play does what I think every good play, book, movie, or anything of that nature should do — it makes me wish it would not end. I want to know what happens to the characters because I have grown to know them. Unfortunately, Shakespeare can't help me out there. But I have this great idea for a sequel. It's called Thirteenth Night: Malvolio's Revenge. Any interested backers?

## Meredith Opened New Road on Nov. 20



(photos by Susan Cartrette)