

CASTING THE 'NET

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The Will Geer's Theatricum Botanicum of Topanga kicks off their 2022 repertory season with the classic play by William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a comic piece where John Falstaff arrives in a small town to court not one, but two wealthy married women in order for him to tap into their wealth, ramping up toward a humorous jumble of situations set within the named (and merry) hamlet.

Instead of taking place in Windsor England at the turn of the 17th century, the scene is now set in Windsor, Connecticut in the 1950's. Jeff Wiesen plays John Falstaff who attempts to seduce Mistress Page (Willow Geer) and Mistress Ford (Emily Bridges) whose husbands are connected to a lot of money that Falstaff desires to get. But the pair of wives have their own plans of this prime example of a comedy of errors.

And the way this version of *The Merry Wives*... is presented, it's a load of fun. It features frantic slapstick humor throughout. It's even a musical of sorts where songs of the era (1950's that is) is interjected at times that show off much of the humor that's been around for some 400 years, even if one wouldn't even know of it! A robust cast of additional players don the Theatricum Botanicum stage set within the canyons of Topanga. Along with the above noted players, Cavin (CR) Mohrhardt appears as Dr. Caius, Alistair McKenzie portrays Parson Hugh Evans (who speaks in Irish tones), Tim Halligan appears as Shallow, and Earnestine Phillips is featured as the gutsy Hostess of the Garter.

Ellen Geer directs this production with plenty of comic flair and timing added to boot. Tracy Wahl designs the costuming that do hark the 1950's in splendor, while Marshall McDaniel provides the musical direction that labels this show as a musical. (This writer likes that idea of a musical where that fact is noted twice within this review!!)

The rest of the cast in this program also features as listed in their alphabetical order, Joseph Darby, Miller Friedman, Christopher Glenn Gilstrap, Julius Geer-Polin, Ethan Haslam, Corrin King, Alexandra Kunin, Charles Lin, Ashley Maimes, Michaela Molden, Kenneth Montley, Aleksander Ristic, Gerald C. Rivers, Taylor Jackson Ross, A.M. Sannazzaro, Andy Stokan, Sky Wahl, Seth Weaver and Elliott Grey Wilson.

If one hasn't brushed up with their Shakespeare, don't worry. It's a show that is as timeless as ever. Some of the dialogue was accommodated for post-modern audiences, but it's still a tale from The Bard. Even Willie himself would approve of this show since it makes his name and his plays live onward. A few playwrights can come close, but good ol' WS tops them all!

This program runs in repertory with three other programs, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, also by Willie Shakespeare opening opening on June 12th, and two contemporary plays: Ernest Thompson's *The West Side Waltz* on June 25th, and *Trouble The Water* by Rebecca Dwight Bruff and adapted for the stage by Ellen Geer. *Trouble The Water* opens on July 9th.

For tickets and further information, call (310) 455-3723 or online at <http://www.theatricum.com>

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