

Shakespeare in Zilker Park: 'The Comedy of Errors' is lovely spring fare

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Tony Salinas and Madison Weinoffer in Austin Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors."
Contributed by Bret Brookshire

Shakespeare in the park can be a difficult prospect. With an audience that is constantly moving around, reclining on blankets and checking their phones, plus a broad range of technical problems that must be overcome, it's often difficult to keep momentum going throughout several

hours. Add to this the complexities of Shakespearean language, and often you have a recipe for disaster. Fortunately, Austin Shakespeare's free production of "The Comedy of Errors" at the Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater, playing through May 28, manages to avoid most of these problems through a high-energy, fast-paced interpretation that highlights the zaniness and broad comedy of the text. Director Robert Ramirez's placement of the show in a bustling port city works well with the spring serenity of the hillside theater, creating a wonderful atmosphere for one of Shakespeare's silliest works.

As the title suggests, "The Comedy of Errors" is a comedic play that centers around two pairs of twins and a resulting series of mistaken identities. The text's mishaps come to life on the expansive Zilker stage, allowing for a series of deliberately hammy performances that are perfect for outdoor theater.

Tony Salinas, as Antipholus of Syracuse, is a delightful leading man, able to mine Shakespeare's complicated linguistics for the comedic punches that resonate with contemporary audiences. He is counterpoised against the more physical comedy of Toby Minor, as his long-lost twin brother, Antipholus of Ephesus. Accompanying both men are their servants, who also happen to be long-lost twin brothers. Dromio of Syracuse (Madison Weinoffer) and Dromio of Ephesus (Hannah Rose Barfoot) provide the comedic core of the show, with broad, hilarious slapstick of both the physical and verbal variety.



Catherine Grady and Marc Pouhé in Austin Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors." Contributed by Bret Brookshire

Unfortunately, "The Comedy of Errors" is unable to escape from the usual problems that an outdoor production faces. The sound system can be very touchy, with actors' microphones cutting in and out, even in the middle of important lines. Designer Patrick W. Anthony's lights, though beautiful and evocative, are only truly visible in the second half of the show, after the sun has gone down.

Anthony's sets, on the other hand, are crucial for creating the whimsical atmosphere, painting a landscape on which the actors are free to play.

This production of "The Comedy of Errors" is not one that redefines the text or uses it to make deep statements about current events. Rather, it embraces the timeless comedic romanticism of Shakespeare's words and uses them to create a lovely entertainment filled with wit, whimsy, and (as with all good comedies) a happy ending, of course.

"The Comedy of Errors"

When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Sunday through May 28

Where: Zilker Hillside Theater, 2206 William Barton Drive

Cost: Free

Information: austinshakespeare.org