

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

The University of Adelaide Theatre Guild

Little Theatre, University of Adelaide

Until May 28

Review by Stephanie Johnson

A merry thought: “The Merry Wives of Windsor” was written 400 hundreds years ago and is still leading audiences a merry dance today.

In fact this ancient Shakespeare play is not so dissimilar to modern-day British farces – men and women’s sexual trickery, slapstick gags and a plethora of quirky characters.

The main difference, of course, is the linguistic gymnastics of the Elizabethan Shakespearean dialect – the challenge of any good theatrical company taking on Shakespeare.

On the whole the Adelaide University Theatre Guild has risen to the challenge to provide a night of merriment for all.

The set of a modern-day pub or bar, leftover from last year’s production of “Twelfth Night”, does not work and leaves little room for inspiration by set or costume designers. A more impressive set would have greatly enhanced this production.

Nevertheless Director Alice Teasdale has made the most of the intimate, semi-circle setting of the Little Theatre. Cast members enter and exit from various directions and even make use of the front row adding much to the fun of the night.

Under Teasdale’s direction most of the cast have discovered the key to unlocking the treasure of Shakespeare’s language.

The wonderful wit of the bard rolls skillfully off the tongue of Gary George as the central character Sir John Falstaff. George is superb in his portrayal of this unsavory Falstaff who decides to embark on a career of seducing wealthy wives thus sparking a series of events that equals the best episode of “Desperate Housewives”.

Georgia Dodd (Mrs Ford) and Ann Weaver (Mrs Page) ably work their wiles as the wicked wives who decide to turn the tables on Falstaff. Robert Elliott (Mr Ford) and Darius Malachite (Mr Page) are outshone by their wives.

Anna Pike as crafty Mistress Quickly, Aldo Longobardi as the silly judge Shallow, David Thring as agreeable Parson Evans, and Julian Jaensch as the very French Doctor Caius all add shape to the story with their clever characterizations and handling of the language.

Tim Deane-Freeman is also adept at milking the laughs in his Norman Gunston-like performance as Slender and both Marlon Dance-Hooi as Pistol and Johan Haris as Nim add to the fun, particularly in their fairy costumes.

There are no profound lessons in this play. It is a cute plot that has stood the test of time.