



SHOREVIEW PRESS > NEWS

## Mounds View students stage 'Roaring 20s' Shakespeare

Print Page

by Jane Fredericksen  
Contributing Writer

Published:  
Tuesday, January 12, 2010 4:51 PM CST

ARDEN HILLS — They call themselves “The Shakespeareans.”

More than 50 Mounds View High School students will stage William Shakespeare's comedy, “Much Ado About Nothing,” Jan. 14 to 16 at the high school auditorium. What makes the show unique is that everything — from casting to costuming to construction to crew work — is performed by students, not by adults.



Käri Nielsen (Director), Elyse Voyen (Hero), and Alex Fream (Ursula). - Photo by Katelyn Walsh

“We are completely student-run, but we are required to have an adult advisor in the building at all times,” said Julia Valen, 17, one of the production's two directors.

The North Oaks senior explained that their advisor rarely interferes, allowing students the freedom to create their own interpretations of each play. Last year's production of “Twelfth Night” included a Glam-Rock motif. This year's production is set in the 1920s.

“We always set it in a different era,” said Valen. “It's something that makes it more relatable.”

Valen — a ballet dancer — has acted in school productions and the Minnesota Fringe Festival. She played Viola in “Twelfth Night” and is considering a theater career after graduation.

This is in her second year with The Shakespeareans and her first time directing.

“It's almost more of an intense experience than being an actor, because you have to have an in-depth knowledge of all the characters,” she noted.

Valen tackled her directing role like a pro. She read the play, watched the 1993 movie version, attended a Theatre in the Round production, read books (including some her mother brought back from a London visit) and — in her words — “researched the heck out of it.”

Last summer, she and co-director Kari Nielsen attended a Shakespeare Intensive camp at the Guthrie Theater.

Nielsen, an 18-year-old senior from North Oaks, has interned at White Bear Lake's Lakeshore Players Theatre. This is also her directing debut, though she's been involved with The Shakespeareans since she was a sophomore.

“Much Ado About Nothing” is her favorite Shakespeare play, Nielsen said.

“One of the characters is sort of an early feminist,” she explained. That inspired the directors to set the play in the 1920s, a time of early feminism and social change. “We wanted to kind of comment on the ... great changes in social norms.”

The play involves two sparring wits — Benedick and Beatrice — who find themselves drawn together against their own wills when their friends Claudio and Hero become engaged.

Josh Jones, a Shoreview junior, plays marriage-shy Benedick. Molly Ruffner, a Shoreview senior, is tart-tongued Beatrice. St. Anthony junior Josh Powers plays young Claudio and Shoreview junior Elyse Voyen is bride-to-be Hero.

Both Valen and Nielsen said one challenge was helping actors to memorize lines. "This play is all prose," said Nielsen, "So it doesn't flow as well as some of the ones written in iambic pentameter."

But if actors know their lines and say them clearly, audiences will enjoy it, Valen said. "So many people in high school study Shakespeare these days that a lot of people 'get it.'"

Performances are 7 p.m. January 14 to 16 at Mounds View High School, 1900 Lake Valentine Road, Arden Hills. Tickets are five dollars at the door, no reservations. For information, e-mail [kariwithdots@gmail.com](mailto:kariwithdots@gmail.com).

Copyright © 2010 - Press Publications

[x] Close Window