

『から騒ぎ (Much Ado about Nothing)』
演出家ポール・ステッピングズのコメント
(Director Paul Stebbings' comment)

Much Ado About Nothing
By William Shakespeare
Directed and edited by Paul Stebbings
Musical score by Paul Flush
Choreography by Eric Tessier-Lavigne
Produced by Grantly Marshall

Much Ado About Nothing throws down a challenge to the audience with its very title. What is this play? A comedy that is not always funny? A tragedy with a happy ending? A thriller even? Or is it a masque: that strange mix between symbolic drama and dance theatre that was to overwhelm English theatre a few years after Shakespeare's death. I think the answer is yes to all these questions - MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING defies categorisation but at the same time it reveals Shakespeare's genius. We are used to thinking that tragedy is more profound than comedy, but Shakespeare balanced the comic with the tragic, he knew that profoundest truths are often revealed through laughter - which is a human emotion than no animal can express - whereas sorrow is not so unique. Shakespeare knew that tragedy is enhanced by comedy and vice versa. It is perhaps that presence of comedy in his tragedies that takes them to the peak of human achievement; for surely the gravedigger in HAMLET, the Fool in KING LEAR and the Porter in MACBETH are essential to these iconic masterpieces. The later Shakespeare abandons tragedy altogether, surely believing that tragic-comedy is the most perfect mirror of the human condition. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING is part of a long tradition of dark English humour that starts with Chaucer and continues to this day - Dickens, Wilde, Charlie Chaplin and Beckett all contributed to the genre and Beckett's famous line: "Fail, try again, fail better" is clearly related to the glorious title of MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING. Love and life are never darker than when they are held to be nothing.

Our approach to the play is to try and explore its extremes, not to flatten it by making its conflicting moods and fast changing values into one harmonious whole. This is a baroque masterpiece not a social documentary or romantic comedy. Shakespeare alerts us to this with his setting (or lack of it). It seems Don Pedro is Spanish, Claudio is Italian, while Dogberry and maybe Beatrice are clearly English. Hero seems to be lifted from the classics and to behave as such, (that is from the poems of "Hero and Leander" etc). There is a battle but no one gets hurt. There is an evil villain but he disappears half way through the play. There are whole scenes where nothing actually happens - such as the brilliant scene where Dogberry's Watch fail to tell Leonato of the evil plot. So our approach has been to let all these

elements co-exist as Shakespeare probably intended. We have not sunk to the easy director's trick of setting the play in a consistent time and place - why is this so popular? This play is clearly not set anywhere. We accept this in Baroque painting why not in theatre? And here is a key - the classical world offered the Baroque artist an alternative universe. So our approach is to embrace the baroque, with all its exaggerations and super-realism. This allows the play to breathe (we feel) and allows us to be grotesque - a key word for TNT theatre - and we think for Shakespeare. Besides, the Baroque was entertainment, a release from Christian art and a lot of fun. This is a comedy where the audience is supposed to laugh. Surveillance, tricks, deceits and lies are not just part of the fabric of Messina (as they are in Elsinore) - they are relished. They are almost the only way that this society works. Nothing can be believed that is not first overheard. Nothing is real unless it is discovered by spying. What is spoken openly is usually a lie or a trick. Even the "good" figures inhabit this world and relish its conventions: for example Hero and the Friar. This is not an accident or a game, it is how Messina functions. It therefore seems to us that this secretive and deceitful behaviour must be heightened and dramatised. In doing so we try to expose the folly that Shakespeare was aiming at with his dark comedy. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING is a claustrophobic drama. Beatrice is the great rebel, a woman who openly speaks her mind in a (corrupt) man's world and expects to be left on the shelf for her pains. Her greatest moment is her command to Benedick to "kill Claudio". Because at that instant she sees through the pretence and asks in two plain words for justice in an unjust land. Benedick has to change, not so much because he responds to Beatrice as a lover but because he responds to Beatrice as a rebel who insists on plain truth and justice. When he denies his old bachelor self little is at stake, but when he challenges his old friend to a duel to the death the stakes are high and the denial of his former self far greater. But Shakespeare twists the plot and lets Benedick off the hook. It is the stupidest of all, Dogberry and his Watchmen, who unravel the evil and bring justice. Harmony prevails and even Don John is caught and punished. Has anything been learnt or was it all truly Much Ado About Nothing? This is the glory of Shakespeare's great comedies: it is for the audience to decide. Tragedies have closure (or catharsis). These dark comedies touch us because they resonate and ask us if all our petty cares and self-deceptions are much ado about very little.

Paul Stebbings 2011