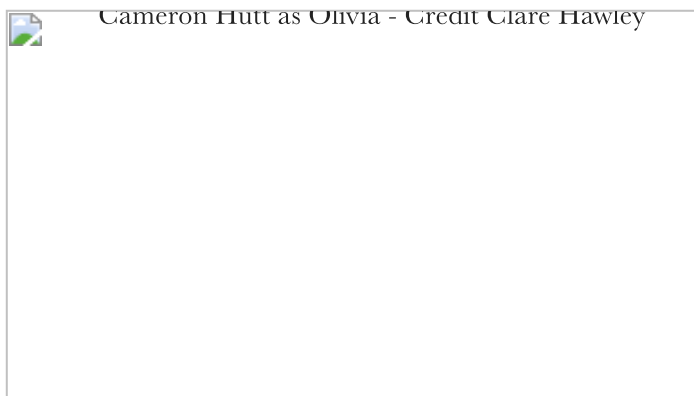




# NIGHT (heads or tails) - Review

January 9, 2021



Prefer to listen? This is a computer generated reading of this review.

There's a funny Sir Laurence Olivier story. He was doing, in night-on-night rep, an energetic Hamlet and a dour Shylock. At one performance he landed the Dane entrance perfectly, swinging on a rope to centre stage, but then hit the first line with '3000 ducats, tis a goodly sum.' It's one of those mysteries of acting that people can keep so much side by side in their mind and the skill, talent, or energetic effort is even more on display in *Twelfth Night (heads or tails)*. From Virginia Plain, and playing at New Theatre, each actor has learned two characters and there's a coin flip beginning the show to determine the night's roles.

What might be considered Bard-gimmickry has really to be seen to be appreciated, and, for an old hand who knows lots of theatre stories, there's added fun to be had in some interval eavesdropping. As gender is undefined by the flipping casting but the text remains he and she, it screws with ya, twin-style!

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voice and the story intact.

All of the cast have a tight command of the text and the modernity of the design doesn't impact on the words. The language is delivered with characterful intent and the speeches we know, have heard of, or are surprised to hear

are Shakespearean are delivered with considerable skill by all involved. It begins with music as the food of love.

Not all of the performances have the required carry, some of the duologues lack spark, but there were several performances which really leapt over the footlights on the night I attended. For example, it was a mighty turn from Cameron Hutt who superbly negotiated the gender and frailty of Olivia with her power and wealth and our empathy as she falls desperately in love with Viola, as Cesario, is extraordinarily moving. That pairing also highlights the well-directed way in which the relationships are expressed and can hold the viewers' attention in the larger scenes.

Zac Bush is charming and funny as Viola/Cesario, but also gives the role a pathos, particularly as Viola's astonishment at the accusations against her grow. We really feel for her. With ennui rather than ardent wooing foregrounded in Rowena McNicol's dispirited, yet warm, Orsino, one can see why Viola falls so hard, and there were several other enjoyable performances in the configuration I saw.

Eleni Cassimatis' Sir Toby who knows how to make drunken entrances very funny and cruelty very insidious; Lucinda Howes' Feste has an assured command of the wit and wisdom; Lucy Ross as Maria twists the maidservant trope to nasty in places but without ever losing that sincerity of concern for her mistress; though coming late in the play, Caitlin Williams as Sebastian also brings a lift to the show.

But the night belonged to Sarah Greenwood as Malvolio. It is an hilarious creation woven with yellow threads of gloomy excellence. The interpretation sees Malvolio written in physical lines which loosen as the character travels and a





characters and three doors. A storm of doors for the shipwreck which is neatly done and calibrated for an exciting opening. Useful, too, to have doors when Kalka isn't averse to a quick throw-in of farce for levity. Despite the lighting design being distractingly patchy when a smooth wash would have served the production better, opting for a three-colour palette is unrelentingly pleasing to the eye. The purple is just lovely and the green of the doors especially clever as they hide behind the box-tree. As is the shadow throw from the floor instruments and there is a terrific one-time use of flash white that is purposeful storytelling. The music and audio is equally restrained and used to best advantage, with seas behind and a modern imperative.

*Twelfth Night (heads or tails)* nails its landing and is a fun night out, an entertaining interval and an achievement of scale in a theatrical time when one or two person shows are the norm. The show you see will not be the experience I had, apparently there are 64 possible combinations, but with the reassurance that all will be well by the final song, I'm sure you will have a laugh and a sigh at this comic and romantic production.

[RbJ Rating](#): 3 ½ cross garters

[Twelfth Night \(heads or tails\)](#) from [Virginia Plain](#) continues at [New Theatre](#) until January 24.



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