

A COMEDY BY
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

TWELFTH NIGHT

DEANS' HALL
BERKHAMSTED

AUGUST 2025



DISCOVER MORE
ThePlayersTC.co.uk

Director's note...

Supporting



Towards the end of 2022 I answered a Facebook ad for actors for a Theatre Company production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This was the beginning of The Players Theatre Company and the start of a fabulous couple of years under the directorship of the indefatigable Sarah Jones.

Sarah's energy seemed limitless. She dealt with everything initially from venues and posters, to costume and actually directing the actors!

After our first amazing outdoor production of the Dream, we all knew we had found something special and Sarah's suggestion to stay together as a company was eagerly accepted by all.

The next production(s) was a cycle of 9 one act Noël Coward plays – *Tonight at 8:30*. This was an absolutely mammoth task – 3 triple bills over 3 weekends. It was very successful and both terrifying and thrilling – typical of Sarah's audacity.

We did our second outdoor Shakespeare with *Love's Labour's Lost* in August 2024. This was a joyous production and another rip-roaring success for The Players.

Sarah passed away in October 2024. It was devastating to us but she had put together a fabulous group of people and we are determined to keep her legacy going.

So, here we are with our first production without her.

She is missed beyond measure but we have imbued this production of *Twelfth Night* with the usual gusto and joy that Sarah always strove for.

In honour of her memory, 10% of show profits will be shared between The Hospice of St Francis and Breast Cancer Now.

We hope you enjoy the show!

Sarah Howell
Director

Cast & Creative

CAST

Viola/Cesario	Connie O'Donnell*
Captain	Jez Cladd
Sebastian	Daniel O'Donnell*
Antonio	Ben Hooker
Orsino	Paris Arnold
Officer 1	Bob Taylor
Valentine/Officer 2/Priest	Issy Bladen
Olivia	Niki Lewarne
Feste	Lynne Magennis
Malvolio	Ben Sowden
Sir Toby Belch	Haydn Davis
Sir Andrew Aguecheek	Andrew Peter Shaw
Maria	Jo Emery
Fabian	Marc Howden-Smith

*Yes! – They are siblings!

CREATIVE TEAM

Director	Sarah Howell
Stage Manager	Janine Wall
Wardrobe	Niki Lewarne
Hair & Makeup	Niki Lewarne, Connie O'Donnell & members of the Company
Set Design	Lynne Magennis, Dan O'Donnell, Adrian Magennis
Set Building	Adrian Magennis, Lynne Magennis, Dan O'Donnell
Painter	Dan O'Donnell & Connie O'Donnell
Musical Backing Arrangements	Connie O'Donnell
Sound & Lighting	Andrew Peter Shaw & Jay White
Publicity Design	Simon Howell

The show will last approximately 2 hours 20 minutes including a 20 minute interval



The plot

A storm wrecks a ship off the coast of Illyria. Viola survives but believes her twin brother, Sebastian, has drowned. She's a stranger in a strange land, and with the help of a friendly sea captain, she disguises herself as a young man, "Cesario" – and enters the service of Duke Orsino.

Orsino is in love with Countess Olivia, who's in deep mourning and refuses to see anyone. He sends Cesario to woo her on his behalf. But Olivia is taken with the charming young messenger, not knowing Cesario is really Viola in disguise. And Viola, for her part, has fallen quietly for Orsino.

In Olivia's household, other plots are hatching. Her fun-loving uncle Sir Toby Belch invites the foolish Sir Andrew Aguecheek to try his luck courting Olivia. Together with Olivia's witty maid Maria and the jester Feste, they forge a letter to trick Olivia's pompous steward, Malvolio, into thinking she loves him. Malvolio falls for it completely and the consequences are darker than anyone expects.

As Viola tries to keep her identity hidden, things unravel fast. Olivia pursues Cesario. Orsino pours his heart out to the wrong person. Sir Andrew challenges Cesario to a duel. Viola is terrified.

Then Sebastian, alive and unaware, arrives in Illyria. He is mistaken for Cesario by everyone. Olivia proposes marriage to him, believing he is the same man who courted her earlier. He says yes.

With identities scrambled and tempers fraying, the final act brings truth to light. The twins are reunited. Malvolio emerges, humiliated. Olivia is stunned but satisfied. Orsino finally understands Viola's loyalty and love.

Twelfth Night ends in reunion, marriage, and music — with a note of melancholy beneath the joy. It's a play about disguise, desire, and the strange paths love can take.

SARAH HOWELL | DIRECTOR



Performing has always been Sarah's passion. However, here she finds herself directing!

She fell in love with acting whilst doing her drama O-level – how old?! Favourite roles include Titania in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Rita in 'Educating Rita', Dolly Messiter in 'Still Life' and Costard in 'Love's Labour's Lost'. I was also delighted to be involved with Berkhamsted Youth Theatre when my son was a member and directed several plays with them.

This is my first time directing adults! It's been an absolute blast! This is a fantastically talented group of performers and backstage team and it's been a delight to put this together.



CONNIE O'DONNELL | VIOLA/CESARIO

Connie has played 15 roles in just two years, from Shakespeare and Noël Coward to musicals and modern drama.

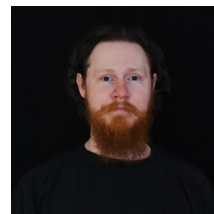
Off-stage, she's a science voiceover artist and an award-winning poet. Later this year, she will appear in *Skellig*, *Apple Pips*, and *Cinderella*.



JEZ CLADD | CAPTAIN

Jez is making his second appearance with The Players. His last performance was in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

With a background in amateur musical theatre, Shakespeare feels like serious acting to him, and he absolutely thrives on it. The challenge is in the interpretation and delivery of those lines.



DAN O'DONNELL | SEBASTIAN

Dan began his theatre career in *Tonight at 8.30* by Noël Coward, with his first Shakespeare production as Lord Longaville in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Dan is also recognised for his work in set and prop building and design, known for his creativity and strong attention to detail.



BEN HOOKER | ANTONIO

Ben has been on stage for over 15 years with various local groups. Most recently Superintendent in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* with Running Joke Theatre Company.

Previously announcing his hatred of Shakespeare, Ben suddenly finds himself converted, playing the saviour seaman Antonio, having been persuaded the play is comedy!



PARIS ARNOLD | ORSINO

Paris has been acting since a young age, including an early role as a gold-painted alien.

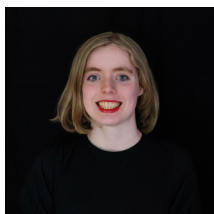
An English teacher sparked his love of Shakespeare, and Paris has since appeared in productions—Shakespearean and modern—across the UK.

These have involved live donkeys, lively audiences, comedy, despair... and (more to come today) love.



BOB TAYLOR | OFFICER 1

Bob has been a thesp for some 35 years, having 'retired' two years ago has now decided to return to the fold and is looking forward to treading the boards again.



ISSY BLADEN | VALENTINE/OFFICER 2/PRIEST

Issy joined The Players whilst still at school and has appeared as an actor in all of our productions to date.

She is currently a student at University of Nottingham where credits include Assistant Producer on Laura Lomas' *Chaos*. She is also coordinator of Creatives, a student improv group.



NIKI LEWARNE | OLIVIA

Niki returned to the theatre in 2022, with over 20 roles since in acting, plus production & costume credits.

Shakespeare roles include Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Her panto debut was in 2024 with Unbound Theatre and she stepped into production with Running Joke Theatre Company.



LYNNE MAGENNIS | FESTE

Relatively new to the world of acting, Lynne made her Shakespearian debut as Flute in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and then as Don Adriano de Armado in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

After her first lead role as Betty in *A Passionate Woman* she is delighted to return to Shakespeare and the magic of live theatre once more.



BEN SOWDEN | MALVOLIO

With The Players, Ben has played Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Moth in *Love's Labours Lost*, as well as multiple roles in *Tonight at 8.30*.

He recently played the Maniac in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and worked locally with Unbound and Ubiquitous.

Directing credits include *A Passionate Woman* and *Skellig*.

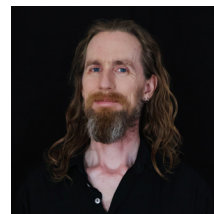


HAYDN DAVIS | SIR TOBY BELCH

Haydn has performed in venues all over the South-East (and France). This is his fifth production with The Players.

Favourite roles in the past include Sherlock Holmes, Scrooge, Otto Frank and Boyet (*Love's Labour's Lost*). Recent shows have been *The Witches of Eastwick* and *Rough Sleeper*.

Hope you enjoy the performance.



ANDREW PETER SHAW | SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK

Andy has been in local theatre groups for 7 years on various projects, including an award-winning tour around Bucks of King Richard II, playing the title role; 7 of Noel Coward's *Tonight at 8.30*; Craze in *A Passionate Woman*; Seyton in *Macbeth*; and now, Sir Andrew Aguecheek; fun with physical and vocal comedy!



JO EMERY | MARIA

Jo is an Actor, Director, Producer, Playwright in Herts, Bucks, London, with Radlett Players, Tidemark, Company of Ten, OVO, StageSpell, Pump House Watford, DeeBee Productions, Breakaway Theatre, Drama Impact, Unbound Theatre, Fighting High, MASH, The Players.

She set up Jo Emery Productions in 2014 (JoEmery.co.uk)



MARC HOWDEN-SMITH | FABIAN

This is Marc's 40th year in the theatre. Marc trained at East 15 Acting School, before working professionally for five years. He has played lead roles in many musicals.

This is Marc's first production with The Players, and he's thrilled to be part of it.

Marc is also a black belt instructor in the martial art of Aikido.