

# The Daily Telegraph

## Thea Sharrock's enchanting production of *As You Like It* is full of mischief and sexual attraction



Perhaps the greatest wonder of Shakespeare is that he is inexhaustible. However, even a Shakespeare addict like me felt a touch apprehensive about seeing *As You Like It* again just a few weeks after Michael Boyd's fine, dark staging opened in Stratford.

I needn't have worried. Thea Sharrock's production is funnier and sunnier than Boyd's and almost continuously enchanting. It may not dig quite so deep, but on a summer's night by the Thames, it is irresistible.

At this address one always feels especially close to Shakespeare and individual lines take on a sudden resonance. When Jaques delivers his great Seven Ages of Man speech, beginning "All the world's a stage", it seems to have been written explicitly for the Globe, and as if Shakespeare had wanted his audience to make the connection between the name of the theatre and the line the actor utters.

There's a lovely moment, too, when Tim McMullan's splendidly resonant melancholic talks of a "Greek invocation to gather fools into a circle" before gesturing round the wooden O at the audience itself – we fools who are indeed gathered in a circle.

Sharrock's production is full of such felicities. There's a constant feeling of wit, mischief and strong sexual attraction. The Globe's great stage columns have been turned into tree trunks in the forest of Arden and Orlando's unstoppable flow of poems to Rosalind rain down on the audience from the upper balcony.

Sharrock certainly doesn't stint on the play's early violence. The younger than usual usurping

Duke (a brilliantined Brendan Hughes) clearly has a streak of sadism in his nature, and a taste for torture (Oliver has his finger nails pulled out), and the wrestling match is a no-holds-barred thriller.

But, once we move to Arden, the sun seems to come out and love blossoms. Naomi Frederick and Laura Rogers make a lovely double act as Rosalind and Celia, sometimes screaming together like over-excited schoolgirls, but their friendship is put under severe pressure when Rosalind starts wooing Orlando in her highly persuasive, excitingly androgynous disguise as boy (she put me in mind of the young David Bowie).

She and Jack Laskey's delightfully shambolic, rumple-haired lover, looking like the skinny frontman of an indie rock band, are dressed identically in Elizabethan leathers, and there is a terrific sexual frisson as Rosalind runs her finger up his arm kisses him full on the lips – even though he still thinks she's a boy.

Among the supporting cast, Dominic Rowan is that rare thing, a genuinely funny Touchstone, somehow extracting genuine humour from jokes that usually fall deservedly flat and incorporating some splendid comic business of his own involving an astonishingly life-like goat and the discovery of animal dung on his shoes.

But almost every role comes to life in a production that combines great gales of audience laughter with magical moments of emotional depth when the whole house seems to be holding its breath.

**Charles Spencer, 10 June 2009**