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Going Hip To Hip For Shakespeare

By **Barbara Arnstein**

Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing," as performed this summer by the touring Hip to Hip Theatre Company, is a joy, pure and simple.



The museum, a restored Flushing home, has gingerbread-house beauty. Its garden includes a large trellis dripping with big bunches of plump purple grapes, and there are beautiful blossoms blooming everywhere.

Directed by co-founder and actor Jason Marr, the nonstop 90-minute performance emphasizes the elements of farce as pranks are pulled, dancers prance, and sweethearts fight a merry war of wits. Every main character eventually fools another and is fooled in turn.

On Aug. 5 the comedy, set mostly in a garden, was presented in its most appropriate venue, the beautiful Victorian garden behind the restored gingerbread-style mansion in Flushing known as the Voelker Orth Museum, amidst twining vines, dangling bunches of grapes and all types of colorful blooms.

The story begins as soldiers Benedick (Damon Kindard) and Claudio (Tim Dowd) return home from war to tackle the challenges of love. Claudio hopes to marry Hero (co-founder Joy Marr) while Benedick claims he never wants to marry but is secretly attracted to the one woman he seemingly can't attract: Beatrice (Elizabeth Alice Murray). Calmer than Kate in "Taming of the Shrew," the self-assured Beatrice is just as witty. She and Benedick endlessly war with words, neither revealing their real feelings, until six of the other characters conspire to trick them into doing it.

Claudio's romantic dreams are almost sabotaged by the scheming Don John (Rafael Miguel) and his follower Borachio (Cristina Carrion) until the bumbling constable Dogberry (Kevin Shimko) saves the day. The cast expertly handles the entertaining twists and turns of trickery in "Much Ado" as identities are exchanged, eavesdropping is enacted and seeming tragedy turns to triumph.

Kindard brings great dignity to his role (he alternates as the title character in this year's other Hip to Hip production, "Othello") along with excellent comic timing; Murray's Beatrice is wonderfully confident and comical; and Joy Marr's portrayal of Hero is

spirited and charming. The actors demonstrate their versatility by each acting out two very different parts, some originally of the opposite gender.

Headquartered in Woodside, Hip to Hip is a five-year-old non-profit company dedicated to presenting free Shakespeare in various parks (and Voelker Orth's garden) including Fort Totten Park, Forest Park and the Socrates Sculpture Park. Find them at hiptohip.org or call (718) 729-8567 to see their remaining summer schedule. To join their mailing list, email contact@hiptohip.org.

The Voelker Orth Museum is located at 149-19 38th Ave in Flushing. For information about tours, special events and exhibits, go to vomuseum.org or call (718) 359-6227.