



Much to like in Hip to Hip's 'Much Ado'

by [Sophie Krichevsky](#), associate editor

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Though the play is called “Much Ado About Nothing,” that cannot be said of Hip to Hip Theatre Co.’s production of the show, which is certainly something to see.

Roughly 75 people of varying ages attended the group’s Aug. 4 performance of the beloved Shakespeare comedy in Crocheron Park, setting up their lawn chairs and picnic blankets at the bottom of the hill, which created a natural amphitheater of sorts. That, along with the surrounding greenery, made for the perfect spot for the lemon vine-covered, dark wooden set (save for the occasional car driving down 35th Avenue).

The company's rendition of the play, which centers on two love stories plagued with mixed messages and misunderstandings, is one of two alternating shows in its 15th annual Free Shakespeare in the Parks summer tour, the other being the lesser-known "The Adventures of Pericles."

At the heart of the "Much Ado" cast is Colin Wulff, whose excellent choice and execution of facial expression capture Benedick's coy and flirtatious (yet at moments, flummoxed) manner.

Director and company co-founder Joy Marr spoke very highly of Wulff, who has progressed from playing smaller parts when he first joined the company.

"That first year he was with us, we lost like a pretty big part the week that we were closing," she recalled. "He subbed in so incredibly ... I was like, 'Wow, this is a whole different play with this guy acting with us.'"

Wulff finds an excellent scene partner in Chaunce Chapman, who, as Beatrice, stole the show. Her electric performance was characterized by her knack for physical comedy and hilarious cadence, which in turn made the language much easier for a younger audience to comprehend.

Chapman was not the only one with excellent physical comedy. Joy Marr's fingerprints are all over one scene, during which Benedick is not so subtly eavesdropping on a conversation. Knowing that someone is listening in on the discussion, Claudio (John DeFilippo), Leonato (Jason Marr) and Don Pedro (Steven Lamont), take a well-timed, giant step back toward Benedick's hiding spot, all in lock-step; that elicited a roar of laughter from the audience.

Equally expressive were DeFilippo and Logan Schmucker, who plays Don John, who has just fallen to Don Pedro, his half-brother, in a small war. At one point toward the beginning of the play, Schmucker absolutely nailed Don John's bitterness and reluctance to serve Don Pedro in such a way that one can only laugh at the tension. DeFilippo's approach to Claudio is spot-on, and gets his character's shyness and awkwardness exactly right.

Which is why his dramatic performance during the wedding scene, when he publicly accuses Hero of adultery, is somewhat jarring. That may in part be due to the play's being truncated to 90 minutes, a staple of the company's family-friendly shows; it's likely the audience missed some of Claudio's more nuanced scenes. Given the company's small size, naturally, some people play more than one role. And while most of the time, it was not an issue, Schmucker's doubling as Don John and a member of the watch team is confusing, since it is Don John and his henchman who orchestrate the plan the group is involved in.

Hip to Hip's remaining Queens performances — both of "Much Ado" and "Pericles" — are on Aug. 11, 12, 13, 17 and 18 at various parks throughout the borough. Visit hiptohip.org/current-production.html for performance times and locations.