

AFTER *dark*Nothing is quite  
as it seemsVermont Shakespeare Company  
production provides silly funBy Brent Hallenbeck  
Free Press Staff Writer

**NORTH HERO** — These might be two phrases you've never heard together before: "William Shakespeare" and "silly fun."

If you spent too many collegiate hours with your head buried in "The Riverside Shakespeare" thinking poor Yorick is not the only one deserving of an "alas," it might be hard to imagine that The Bard could be — gulp! — fun, let alone silly fun. The Vermont Shakespeare Company demonstrates that in full force, however, with its production of "The Comedy of Errors," which opened Thursday in the beautiful dusky alfresco setting of Knight Point State Park in the Champlain islands.

If anything, VSC's production might be too fun — there's enough shrieking and running around to fill four episodes of "I Love Lucy" — but it's perfect frothy entertainment for Vermonters cooped up by all the rain this summer. "The Comedy of Errors" is an escape in every sense of the word.

If the afore-referenced "Hamlet" is Shakespeare's dramatic masterwork, "The Comedy of Errors" is his "Dumb and Dumber." The plot requires a serious suspension of disbelief: Twin brothers Antipholus (played by Dan Matisa and Dan Matisa), separated more or less at birth, wind up in the Mediterranean city of Ephesus with their servants, the twin brothers Dromio (played by Sheffield Chastain and Shef-

## If you go

■ **WHAT:** William Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors," by the Vermont Shakespeare Company

■ **WHEN:** 6 p.m. through Sunday

■ **WHERE:** The Islands Center at Knight Point State Park, North Hero

■ **TICKETS:** \$20 for adults (park admission included); free for children under 12 (must pay park fee)

■ **INFORMATION:**  
877-874-1911,  
[www.vermontshakespeare.org](http://www.vermontshakespeare.org)

field Chastain), separated more or less at birth. That's right, the mothers of both sets of twins possessed the wild sense of imagination that allowed them to give their twin sons the same name, much in the same way boxing and grilling legend George Foreman named all his sons George ("Alas, poor Logic, I knew him, Horatio").

Despite not knowing each other, the twins share genes that allow them to dress identically save for a set of eyeglasses or a dapper hat to distinguish them. The audience is up to speed on who's who, but the slow-witted residents of Ephesus — including Adriana (Katharine McLeod), the wife of one of the Antipholuses — are completely flummoxed. Merry mayhem ensues as Ephesian after Ephesian mistakes one Antipholus or one Dromio

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## ERRORS: Shakespeare in the park

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for the other, leading to various sticky wickets ranging from arrest to marital strife.

To his credit, director John Nagle (who, with his wife, Jena Neqrason, heads the Vermont Shakespeare Company) knows "The Comedy of Errors" is a goofy bit of fluff and runs with it. Actors breaking away for brief soliloquies leave their cast mates behind in freeze-frame stillness until returning to the scene at hand. The cast of nine takes on multiple roles, donning Charlie Chaplin-esque mustaches or glaringly fake beards and sometimes neglecting (intentionally, we think) to remove their facial hair before returning as another character. Costumes and props are bizarrely anachronistic: An actor in antiquated, vaguely piratical garb munches on snacks from what appears to be modern-day movie-theater popcorn boxes. A giddy, surreal plot deserves giddy, surreal direction, and Nagle delivers.

The cast clearly understands the tone Nagle wants. Chastain and Matisa produce tremendous energy and theatrical dexterity in their dual dual roles. Matisa man-

ages to keep a regal air despite the wackiness, and contributes droll humor. Chastain toes the high wire between delightful and over the top and, fortunately, never falls off. His Jim Carrey-like rubbery expressions beget laughter without words, and his words — often emoted with the force of a woman giving birth — can be hilarious, especially when one of the Dromios bemoans the unwanted love of a rotund woman who is "no longer from head to toe than hip to hip; she is spherical, like a globe."

The two women most affected by the comingling of twins, Adriana and her sister, Luciana (Katelin Wilcox), are pitch-perfect. As Adriana, McLeod comes unglued with all the confusion, at one point donning sunglasses and clutching a margarita glass like a derailed starlet. Wilcox provides rare moments of stability in an earthquake of befuddlement.

The three Vermonters in the cast — Robert Nuner, Mark Roberts and Ruth Wallman — deliver fine if brief performances. Nuner is especially good as the morose father of the twins, demonstrating a decidedly Shakespearean baritone that

instantly commands respect. Daniella Rabbani shines in several roles, especially as a slinky courtesan. One of the few misses comes from Parrish Hurley, who's good as a merchant and a goldsmith but as a devilish conjurer inexplicably quivers like a junkie in withdrawal, tipping the production too far into the realm of cartoonish exaggeration.

One of the biggest stars of the night is the setting. The cove of trees that provides the backdrop for the stage not only becomes part of the set, it creates a natural sound screen that lets the audience hear nothing but the actors' powerful voices. The wide-open spaces that stretch behind the rows of bleachers give the audience a sense that there's a vast Mediterranean Sea out there in a way a four-walled theater just can't.

Oh, and one more thing: Beware of any program notes regarding actors claiming to have acted in "Multiplicity" or in a film with the Olsen twins. Almost nothing in "The Comedy of Errors" is quite what it seems.

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