

## Sensationalising Shakespeare. Twelfth Night at the Globe

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It is a dream for many a Shakespeare enthusiast or even lover of good theatre to be ensconced **in the home of Shakespearean theatre** such as **the Globe** and what better summer escape **in Rome** have we that exists than the Globe Theatre in Rome that wears a **cool elusive Elizabethan look architecturally** in the immensely pleasant **garden setting** of the extensive **Villa Borghese** lands.

**A winding walk through bowers** of towering trees in the peak of the evening does one good, the ticket booths look authentically old world and I am inside the unique Toti Globe theatre, a novelty in Rome at any rate in the platea as boxes and seating soar in circles around me in the three or four tiered theatrical complex that flourishes under Gigi Proietti's artistic direction and management of Politeama Srl. Spartan and austere wooden seating as was customary in the age (you have George's in the UK and the London Globe on the old Globe site to go by even if The Old Vic is more mythic than real) and cushioned squatting arrangements before the stage, we are reasonably full by the time the night's Shakespeare production Twelfth Night on the premiere evening of 18th. August 2011 commences. All eyes glued to the stage wonder what's in store, what kind of night this twelfth that lies ahead is to be, for the words' adaptation and translation are invariably unsettling especially for one who knows her Shakespeare like the back of her palm.

**The stage design and setting by Oreste Baldini** is intriguing and knowing from experience of recreations of supposedly authentic Shakespeare of the 1600s it is to stay that way through the five acts. In fact as we see the water spouting fountains in two square arrangements represent the luxury of the Duke's Illyria Palace and the rich countess Olivia's house, all metal and gold backdrops that become screens at will to cordon scenes off, it is the real pillar of the stage that doubles up as the mast of the ship that inaugurates the play like a film scene prior to the titles and casting. It also serves as everything from Sir Toby's drinks hideaway that stocks his "stoup of wine" to visible viewpoints with stretchladder when characters wish to get a bird's eye view of the scene. Or eavesdrop for that matter, usual in the comic relief scenes.

**It opens and then it really opens, and how!**

A thundering roll of **drums and violent lights signal a storm at sea** and the twins clinging to the ship getting separated open the tightly sequenced actionpacked drama somewhat melodramatically to one's surprise expecting as we are the languorous celebrated opening line from Shakespeare on music being the food of love. But the Duke hasn't forgotten his lines, it is Director Riccardo Cavallo who's only transposed it. And it is to be! Music signals what has got to be Act One and indeed it plays on, but the Duke in dim lighting with fountains playing much to our astonishment is involved in an explicit sex scene with his messenger to Olivia who presents his love declarations to the Countess without success. The messenger is none other than the Shakespearean Valentino transformed from Duke's male attendant into Olivia's female attendant Valentina by the director. Something Freudian has been

evolved from this tendency of the Duke to use substitutes and messengers to carry his love addresses that he makes love to them literally, to Olivia by proxy while speaking of Olivia! The first of these, this Valentina he has a huge orgy with in the first scene in between Shakespeare's most elevated yet sensual speeches on love as the director capitalises on the sensuality of the lines "if music be the food of love play on, give an excess of it.." and weaves his scene around that excess of lovemaking and sexuality. Even as the Duke is eloquence itself "O spirit of love..." with the revelations of this outside Shakespeare aspect of the Duke who draws a distinction between love and sex, who like twentieth century men and perhaps the regency period men has sex with one while he loves the other, or confuses identities of the love messenger and the lover, we are confused in these double entendres laid on heavily at the very start by Cavallo. How seriously in all this are we to take the Duke's declarations which are exalted in the Shakespearean tone ("...come over my ear like the sweet sound/That breathes upon a bank of violets"...so full of shapes is fancy,/that it alone is high fantastical" when the action and the words bifurcate and wander along different paths and fancy and fantasy are stretched like a wire by director Cavallo. The love interest in Shakespeare is always love at first sight and we have three such lovestricken characters to contend with in Act One, the Duke "methought she purged the air of pestilence....", Viola in Scene 4 when disguised as Cesario the attendant she takes on the unenviable task of pleading her master's case before a cloistered veiled Olivia "..Whichever I woo, myself would be his wife" and Olivia in whom the convoluted trio has its climax as she ironically discards her Isabella-like seclusion and all chaste intentions when she sights this Cesario/Viola. One of the finest speeches, most lyrically poetic, was movingly enacted by Viola entrapped in the ordeal, "Make me a willow cabin at your gate/ And call upon my soul within the house; Write lyric .." Act One is abundant in comedy which Italians are past masters at and the tone of the Italian comic opera and stage enters and blends with the Shakespearean in the scenes with Sir Toby and Maria, and of course Malvolio. Olivia wraps up the act with her couplet, "Fate, show thy force, ourselves we do not owe; /What is decreed must be, and be this so." Of course it takes all five acts for fate's decree to become clear, work itself out and flourish.

### Song & Drama

This production's **Act Two highlights as Viola understands the situation and leaves all** for "time to untangle"(Sc2), included the Scene 3 sequence where Sir Toby Belch and Andrew Aguecheek indulge themselves drinking and marvelling at the clown who has "so sweet a breath to sing". For the sixpence worth of love song they ask for, we get "O mistress mine! Where are you roaming; in the mellifluous voice of the Clown. Joined by the Clown and Maria, the subplot mocking the melancholy Malvolio is generated. A light operetta like trio makes sport of the whole thing as they hatch their plot! In the Duke's Palace, Scene 4, Viola indirectly declares her love for the Duke. We have the Duke's speech "Such as I am all true lovers are:/ Unstaid and skittish in all motions else/Save in the constant image of the creature/ That is beloved." The Clown sings Come Away and when paid for "his pains" retorts he "takes pleasure in singing" and hence gets paid for his pleasure! The Duke and disguised Viola discuss as Rosalind and Orlando do the differences between the loving of men and women. "No woman's heart so big to hold so much..mine is all hungry as the sea/ And can digest as much," says the Duke whereas Viola waxes eloquent on the power of woman's silent loving but adds as Cesario, "Men may say more, swear more; but indeed/ Our shows are more than will, for still we prove, much in our vows but little in our love!" Scene 5 was diverting as Sir Toby, Aguecheek, Fabian and Maria trick and transform Malvolio into the yellowstockinged cross gartered and all smiles character so realistically that Olivia in Act III ascribes it to midsummer madness!

**Act III** had a dazzling scene where Viola and the Clown exchange thoughts on the wiseman and the fool, the nature of wit and use of wordplay. When the clown comes up with "A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit : how quickly the wrong side may be turned outwards."; "Foolery does walk about the orb like the sun; it shines everywhere," Viola thinks the clown "wise enough to play the fool;/ And to do that well craves a kind of wit." All typical Shakespeare! As is although differently the scene between Olivia and Cesario where Olivia's intense impassioned love declarations are in rhymed verse. "Love sought is good but giv'n unsought is better." The subplot intrigue is further complicated come Scene 2 with Aguecheek pressing his case and love for Olivia and Fabian and Toby inciting him to challenge Viola/Cesario to a duel to bring to Olivia's ear the "report of valour." But he mistakes the newly brought to Illyria Sebastian (twin saved by Antonio) for Viola and of course this challenge is the plot tool to introduce Sebastian to Olivia who settles for the look-alike of the right sex. The plot thickens as Antonio mistakes Viola/Cesario for Sebastian and accuses her of ungratefulness but Viola begins to hope her brother is alive whereas Olivia rescues Sebastian from the brink of a duel and taking advantage of his relief lures

him into marriage “in a dream”. (Poor Aguecheek instead of being hailed for his valour is declared “fit for the mountains and barbarous caves/ where manners never were preached” and commanded out of sight! Hence all subplots but that of Malvolio have a purpose and the loose ends are being tied, things resolved slowly but surely.

We are in **Act IV** already. The Clown gets roped into the cruel subplot against Malvolio and Shakespeare indulges in the usual repartee between fool-melancholy character as they exchange wisecracks and thoughts on darkness and light, wisdom and ignorance. The comedy of errors arising from the mistaken identities of the twins Sebastian and Viola is wrapped up. The two actors playing their roles although bearing different family names bore a distinct resemblance to each other, had similar builds and faces and movements which was astonishing to behold in this production. In that, the Cavallo treatment definitely scored whether or not identical twins were employed in the cast !

### Directorial hotchpotch of sensationalist drama, sex and nudity

The **director Riccardo Cavallo** maintained his grip on the tightpaced slick drama that seldom sagged. His adaptation included the omission of some characters which was to be expected, and the confounding of Illyria (which to me sounds Greece or Cyprus) with the middle east and set the story which is a Mediterranean/Aegian Sea saga at most somewhere in the 1001 nights land, a mix-up of numbers, 12th. night for 1001, with Cesario and others costumed in middle-eastern trousers/salwars and emphasis on exotica at any price! Illyria as opposed to Messaline, the home of Sebastian, Viola and sea captain Antonio which is distinctly Italian, perhaps Sicily, a blend of Messina and Salina from the Aeolian Islands! While the story was closer to home as seen in the comic scenes that rung true and scarcely ever struck a false note, the inclusions of sensationalism, sex and nudity, even the long undress-dress nude scene featuring Viola, were unnecessary. With the days of vulgar sex and nudity thrust on plays and cinema passe, dim the lights, pipe the music and through veils and films and elegant twining body sequences, almost choreographed come on with your sex and nudity scenes and you can sandwich them in anywhere and get away with holy murder. Who dares object to this when done with taste? It is art and artistic, isn't it? Well the public wasn't quite sure whether any of this was Shakespearean but lapped it up when it entered and left in the scheme of things with a fluidity of glassy sound and sinuous lines as each posture was adopted. Cavallo's polished theatrical approach and comic bent was evident in scenes such as the trio in Act I which somewhere between a Rossini trio and the three little pigs musical was amusing and fluently delivered.

The third element ascribed to Cavallo was **the translation which sounded lofty, authentic and reasonably stylish** in the speeches he took few liberties with but descended to bathos and the ridiculous on the occasions when he used contemporary Italian. He had a tendency to use the Italian of 18th. century drama for Shakespearean Elizabethan English and contemporary language for all else, shorter dialogues and less imposing demanding lines. In this the somewhat pedestrian and backslapping Italian contrasted tonally with the former and even clashed. Other than questioning the veracity of the concepts that determined some of the costumes created for this production, which has been touched upon elsewhere in this review, the costumes by Susanna Proietti exquisitely styled, of imaginative hues and textures looked splendid on the main characters and supporting cast as well. Stefan De Meo's incidental music prevailed at many a moment setting the tempo and providing the apt atmosphere for innumerable scenes. From the dynamic story start to tuneful conclusion, the orchestral score with its dramatic intensity worked with foresight and hindsight in the use of motifs and melodic harmonic and percussive embellishments that proved rewarding. All the songs although different from what we're accustomed to in Shakespearean drama were easy on the ear, highly melodic and heartwarming in the voices they were sung in. Franco Patimo's sound effects whether supple or strident invigorated the scene. And light designing by Umile Vainieri was imaginative, controlled and almost intuitive in its responses.

Of the **minor characters, Gerolamo Alchieri as the Clown Feste** not only got top billing in alphabetical order but also the loveliest of songs to sing. The trio bent on getting even with Malvolio Lidia Biondi as Maria, Alessio Caruso as Andrew Aguecheek and Roberto Della Casa as Sir Toby Belch performed with precision and a sense of timing so prized in comedy. Nicola D'Eramo as the exploited Malvolio won the sympathies of all as he strutted yellowstockinged and artificial smiles. The one who landed up in Illyria against his wishes Antonio was wellplayed by Sebastian Colla and the bewildered “in a dream” Sebastian himself by Danielle Grassetti. A hero in that he wins one of the play's heroines, Sebastian ranks as a minor character alas! A winner in terms of status, rank and fortune,

he was an excellent foil to Viola his twin though and to Olivia he is united with.

### The Three Leads

The established **actor, a one time ballet dancer and singer, Carlo Ragone** who has worked with Gigi Proietti on Romeo and Juliet and starred in musicals such as Puss In Boots and the Lloyd-Webber Joseph And The Technicolor Dreamcoat, was aristocratic in his diction and manners and impassioned in his love addresses to the wrong lady! With a keen sense of timing and approach somewhat old fashioned he delivered the Duke with style and concluded the tightly sequenced saga with warmth. Easily the star of the show was Federica Burns as the young hesitant Viola forced into playing Cesario most of her play-life. A charming performer, reasonably goodlooking and youthful in essence, she brought to the fore the veiled femininity of Viola by championing the ideals and thoughts of womankind and speaking of herself by proxy as she was speaking for the Duke to Olivia by proxy. In the unfortunate unenviable predicament of being a messenger to a theoretic rival (who falls in love with the man Viola is not), the actress delivered the humour of situation and well as its poignancy in excellently drawn speeches, coming out and having her say but withdrawing into a shell and never rising above her station as a page in a most convincing manner. Burns endowed her Viola with all the qualities Shakespeare coloured her with from tenderness to grace. Her emotional response to situation moulded by her highbred instincts and her guise, she nevertheless gives vent to her poetical imagination as and when she can with an eloquence. Remarkable in addition to the expected exchanges with the Duke and the crossing of swords in words with Olivia were her warm interchanges with the clown Feste where penetrating powerful one liners are tossed nimbly! An accomplished young star, an alumni of LAMDA ( London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art), Federica Burns has worked with Riccardo Cavallo before in Midsummer Night's Dream and Cherry Orchard and as a Shakespeare heroine has excelled in Daniele Salvo's King Lear, Marco Carniti's Love's Labour's Lost and also in Comedy of Errors.

Although the celebrated **excellent actress Claudia Balboni as Olivia** might have made the perfect countess in mourning and a good match for the Duke, in terms of age both she and the Duke were much too old for the young twins. In that it amounted to cradlesnatching and the matches in Act 5 and the resultant play's resolution looked unconvincing. Other than that factor which jarred, Claudia Balboni delivered all the famous Olivia speeches with tremendous expressiveness and projected a well-comprehended rounded character, whether as the one ruling her household of comic characters all out to play mischief or as the pleader in the one-sided love scenes with Cesario/Viola, as the haughty countess in her dismissive equations with the Duke and Aguecheek or as the concerned employer in the comic interactions with steward Malvolio. Balboni has both stage presence and style, all hallmarks of a Shakespearean actress although age is against her in the establishment of a convincing union with Sebastian in the play's culmination instead of Cesario/Viola. However, in the ultimate as in most Shakespeare comedy, it is the women who have the longer roles. In Twelfth Night, Viola and Olivia get given some of the finest lines and hence we rely on them in their resolute portrayals to draw us closer to a complete understanding of the drama that unfolds on stage and to the one we imagine as happening next (or what you will...) for won't the cast and crew having explored Illyria move on to their honeymoon stage with all the sets of lovers and wedded couples to Messaline which we have heard so much of in Twelfth Night?

In spite of the overwhelming force of **the elements of fantasy in the intoxicating perfumed air of this exotic land** wheresoever it might be, we see the shadowy contours of ephemeral things, are given lopsided and inverted looks at reality in the downright commonsense and earthiness of the comedy, whether through the turmoil and complicated confusion created by the fact of the twins or the duplications of the harmless yet cruel plot against Malvolio and duplicity involved in the games of the common genus of characters such as Maria who imitates the lady's style, elegance and even handwriting, thus mimicking the mistress to the point of indiscretion! More importantly, the theme of the power of love is taken up with a vengeance. Each of the main characters is identified with one or more aspects of love which is the passion, sentiment and emotion that shapes them and enables them to grow and it is through these varied depictions that both plot and character evolve. When there is a consistency in portraying these in all their hues by the cast, the play succeeds. Fanciful and real, sweet and bitter (ironies such as Viola entreating "fair cruelty" and Olivia speaking to the same "heart of stone"), elevated noble sentiments and crude cruel designed comic effects and humour, characters as proverbial as Malvolio and Sir Toby Belch, all blend into the harmonious whole ingenious one picture of the play Twelfth Night. Director Cavallo pulled loose ends together as engrossed in the action we moved towards the sober songful conclusion that jerked us out of any

dissolving into vision and dream, through emphasising the elements of artifice ( as he had earlier by inflicting on the unsuspecting spectator the out of Shakespeare scenes), thus allowing passion and sentiment to rule over enchantment reverie and dream.

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### Scheda Titolo completo:

Complete Cast & Credits of **TWELFTH NIGHT** (*Or What You Will*) by William Shakespeare performed at the [Silvano Toti Globe Theatre in Rome](#) [2] from August 18th. to 28th. (Included) 2011.

Direction, Translation & Adaptation by Riccardo Cavallo. Produced by Politeama Srl.

Stage Design & Sets : Oreste Baldini

Costumes : Susanna Proietti

Music : Stefan De Meo

Light Design: Umile Vainieri

Audio Design : Franco Patimo

CAST : Feste : Gerolamo Alchieri

Countess Olivia : Claudia Balboni

Viola : Federica Bern

Maria : Lidia Biondi

Sir Andrew Aguecheek : Alessio Caruso

Sir Toby Belch : Roberto della Casa

Malvolio: Nicola d'Eramo

Sebastian : Daniele Grassetti

Valentina : Valentina Marziali

Duke Orsino : Carlo Ragone

Sea Captain : Raffaele Proietti

Guards : Matteo Bartoli and Mario Schittzer

- [Teatro](#)

**URL originale:** <http://www.gothicnetwork.org/articoli/sensationalising-shakespeare-twelfth-night-globe>

### Collegamenti:

[1] <http://www.gothicnetwork.org/immagini/twelfth-night>

[2] <http://www.globetheatreroma.com/>