

Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare, directed Mark Da Vanzo and Kathi George
Khandallah Arts Theatre, Cochrane Hall, Cashmere Avenue School, Khandallah till 25 July 2009
Reviewed by Ewen Coleman on 16 July 2009

In Elizabethan times the twelfth day after Christmas was a day of revelry where servants often dressed up as their masters and men dressed as women, which of course is very much the comic aspects of mistaken identity, trickery and tom-foolery that runs through Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and which is where the play gets its title. The Christmas theme, however, is not one often used for productions of *Twelfth Night*, so it was a brave move on the part of directors Mark Da Vanzo and Kathi George to adorn the set of their production for Khandallah Arts Theatre with Christmas Trees and lights. But it worked and very successfully too, complimented by the colourful costumes the actors were dressed in, even though they did cover many styles and periods, all of which gave the production a very festive air.

Through this is played out the well-known story of Viola (Tanya Piejus) dressed as a boy and becoming servant to and falling in love with Orsino (Dave Soper), who is in love with Olivia (Charlotte Stephens), who in turn falls for Viola as a boy when he/she delivers messages for Orsino. Sebastian (Andrew Cross), Viola's twin brother also turns up making the love triangle become a quartet. While these episodes of unrequited love are played out other members of Olivia's household are upto hi-jinks of their own, namely Maria (Kate Blackhurst) and Sir Toby Belch (Chris O'Grady) tricking the hapless and dour Malvolio (John Marwick) into thinking that Olivia loves him. They also trick Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Matt Todd) into a duel with Viola. Running through the play adding more havoc to the already developing mayhem is Feste the Fool (Shannon Tubman).

Very sensibly the directors have taken a very middle of the road approach with this production with no risk-taking or going for extraneous trickery, replying instead on the music and magic of Shakespeare's words to put the play across, which it did with confidence and clarity. All actors on stage were well versed with their lines, understanding well the subtle nuances and by-plays inherent in the dialogue. The four lovers were well matched for their various roles although perhaps a little restrained at times and so some of the passion arising from their love interests was missing. The comic elements however were well played out and an absolute delight to watch.

Never over done or too indulgent, although at times almost, Chris O'Grady's Sir Toby and Matt Todd's Sir Andrew were great foils for each other, aided and abetted by Kate Blackhurst's very mischievous Maria. But it is the haughty, self obsessed Malvolio played by John Marwick that is the star of the show, his comic timing and delivery spot-on to make this a very commendable production of one of Shakespeare's most adorable comedies.