

At Will-O-Way

'Twelfth Night' accent on fun

By BARBARA MICHALS

Mistaken identities, slapstick clowning and innumerable plot twists—such as the stuff of Shakespeare's comedies. As currently presented by Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre, "Twelfth Night" is good fun, and the clarity of the actors' speech compensates for what they lack in Shakespearean eloquence.

The production's greatest strength lies in the actors' ability to make themselves clearly understood at all times. This is a considerable achievement with a Shakespearean play for even audiences accustomed to Shakespearean intonations often have trouble catching every word. The majority of Will-O-Way's cast sticks to Midwest American accents, and the show is the better for it.

The main plot of "Twelfth Night" centers around the attempts of Orsino, a love-sick duke, to woo Olivia, a disinterested countess. Viola, the survivor of a shipwreck, decides to make the best of her awkward situa-

tion by disguising herself as a male page and offering her services to the duke.

Orsino employs Viola to help him court Olivia, but Viola falls in love with Orsino while Olivia falls in love with the page. When Viola is identical twin brother shows up unexpectedly, all sorts of merry complications ensue.

EILEEN WEISS is a competent, engaging Viola, at her best when making amusing asides to the audience or playing broad comedy in the duel scene. One of the play's funniest moments is when a highly reluctant Viola is manipulated into a duel with the cowardly Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Viola becomes a quivering mass of jello, wide-eyed and rubber-legged with fear.

As the duke, Andy Hurley is convincingly love sick. Pat Ursin does a particularly fine job as Olivia and makes her distant for Orsino's courtship amusingly clear.

The play's second plot revolves

around the antics of various members of Olivia's household. Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, is loud, boisterous, earthy and constantly drunk. His drinking pal is Sir Andrew, a "foolish knight" prone to showing off his stupidity.

Maria, Olivia's witty and saucy handmaid, engineers a plot with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew to ridicule Olivia's steward, Malvolio. A pompous, puritanical sort, Malvolio is contented enough to be fooled into thinking that Olivia has fallen in love with him.

Aiding in the plot against Malvolio are the play's two clowns, Feste and Fabian. While Fabian is there mainly to add to the slapstick fun, Feste is the wise and witty professional Fool who points out the foolishness of others.

RICHARD WILLIAMS delivers a strong and winning performance as Sir Toby, his rich voice following in drunken rapture. As Sir Andrew, Les Barnwell's lanky figure enmeshed in bright red tights lends just the appro-

prate tone of the ridiculous. Barnwell is effective, as is Greg Hoemstine playing Fabian, and the two join Williams in some very rough-and-tumble clowning.

Dee Dweley is an animated, convincing Maria. Dike Dweley's naturally deep, dignified voice is well-suited to Malvolio's grave demeanor, and Dweley effects a "pusy-footing" walk that is hilarious in its incongruity to Malvolio's pomposity.

Jack Cortes' comedic talents are not shown to advantage as Feste, which he plays rather heavy-handed, nor does his rich baritone voice sound its best on the brief Elizabethan songs.

The production's extremely simple stage setting works well, and the many scene changes are effectively handled by quick black-outs. Director Celia Merrill Turner keeps the play lively and quick-moving.

"Twelfth Night" continues at Will-O-Way Friday and Saturday evenings through April 23, excluding Easter weekend. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m.



Bard's comic barbs

Dike Dweley of Birmingham is featured as Malvolio in Shakespeare's beloved comedy "Twelfth Night" playing Fridays and Saturdays through April 23 (except Easter weekend) at Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre, 775 W. Long Lake Road, Bloomfield Hills. Dweley (left) rehearses with Feste, the singing clown, played by Jack Cortes, baritone, of Detroit. Music was composed in the Elizabethan style by this production by director Celia Merrill Turner. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. Reservations may be made by phone: 644-4418.

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