



FIRE ISLAND NEWS

→ Fire Island's longest running news source, since 1957 ←

Features Every Issue Communities Info

News & Features
Aug 5

“Two Gentlemen from Verona” Visit Fire Island

By Shoshanna McCollum

The chance to catch a free Shakespeare play on the grounds of Fire Island Lighthouse was an unexpected treat. I discovered it in the Calendar of Events column in this publication and made a plan to catch it. It appears I was not alone in making that decision. The westbound Fire Island Water Taxi on the Saturday afternoon of July 23 was full of Shakespeare lovers bound for the same destination.



“It’s something new and I’m excited to go,” said a woman dressed in a black caftan and smart looking glasses that I was chatting with on the ride. All of us disembarking from the lighthouse bayside marina had to make the boardwalk trek with beach chairs on our backs, but we knew that was part of the deal. I was concerned when I saw the sandy spot between the lighthouse deck and the lens building chosen for the staging area, as it was a hot day and there was barely a hint of shade. However, I found a sliver and stood my ground when a family got there at the same time and expected me to move.

“It’s the only shade here, certainly you don’t mind if I join you,” said menopausal me.

This standoff could have been the making of its own Elizabethan drama, but we soon all settled in together and were eventually greeted by members of the EastLine Theatre company who were warming up the crowd before the show began. It was already warm enough, but it was about then that I noticed the ocean breeze was making things more comfortable.

I won’t pretend that I’m a Shakespeare scholar and must admit to not being all that familiar with “The Two Gentlemen of Verona,” except for knowing it is a comedy and one of the Bard’s early works. Some experts believe this circa 1590s work may even be one of William Shakespeare’s first plays and therefore

an interesting selection for this Long Island theatre troupe to choose.

All that said, seeing this play with fresh eyes, certain things impressed me. I appreciated the modern and minimalized costuming. The two lead characters, Valentine and Proteus, for instance, wore Hawaiian shirts. I have seen enough William Shakespeare productions to know that modern dress is often utilized but could not help thinking their attire was also very Fire Island. I also admired how the actors incorporated the lighthouse into their production as Valentine gestures towards the tower when he laments that his beloved Silvia is locked away in a tower every night by her father, the Duke of Milan, so the two will not elope.

What confused me about the production was that some of the female actors played men – which I get – male actors took on the roles of women when these plays were first shown in the Globe Theatre centuries ago. However, the woman playing Duke of Milan was wearing a green dress. Meanwhile the female actress portraying the woman's role of Julia was wearing pants. To make things even more confusing, in the play Julia at one point goes "disguised" as a man – still wearing pants. Then again, this is Fire Island after all, and gender bending is quite alright.

It was not hard to follow along. It was a story about wanting the one you cannot have – also a common Fire Island scenario. After sleeping on it for a day or two I also began to

realize "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" seemed somehow familiar. Musical interludes by the acoustic guitarist on the sidelines reminded me very much of Jonathan Richman's musical cameos in the 1998 film "There's Something About Mary." Indeed, the plots of both comedies written hundreds of years apart do share a certain affinity.

The slim spot of shade grew over larger over the course of that afternoon, so that all who wanted in on it was welcome. I returned home with that beach chair on my back hoping for the chance to enjoy more Shakespeare in the Park on Fire Island for many summers to come.

Kudos to all!



To learn more about EastLine Theatre's productions across Long Island, visit eastlinetheatre.org.