

For Immediate Release

Auditions set for LTO's production of 'Much Ado About Nothing'

OWATONNA — William Shakespeare returns to Little Theatre of Owatonna with the spring production of the much beloved comedy “Much Ado About Nothing,” and LTO announces auditions for the play.

The auditions will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 19, and Monday, Feb. 20, at the theater, 560 Dunnell Drive in the West Hills complex in Owatonna.

“I like to think of this play as Shakespeare’s great screwball comedy,” said artistic director Jeffrey Jackson. “‘Much Ado’ incorporates all the great elements of a screwball comedy — the classic battle of the sexes in the relationship of Benedick and Beatrice, their fast-paced repartee, and, of course, plotlines involving courtship and marriage. And there are some great comedic characters, like Constable Dogberry and his deputies.”

The play begins as war has come to an end in Italy and a group of soldiers, led by Prince Don Pedro, comes to the city of Messina and to the home of Don Pedro’s good friend Leonato, a well-respected and well-to-do nobleman. Don Pedro is accompanied by Claudio, a young nobleman, and Benedick, a witty gentleman soldier. Also in the prince’s company is Don John the bastard, as Shakespeare calls him — the sullen, illegitimate brother of the prince, who tried unsuccessfully to rebel against the prince in the war.

When the soldiers come to Leonato’s home, Claudio once again reacquaints himself with Leonato’s young daughter, Hero, with whom he falls quickly and deeply in love, much to the chagrin of Benedick, a self-professed “tyrant” to women. Soon thereafter, Claudio and Hero become engaged to be married.

At the same time, Benedick meets up with Beatrice, Leonato’s witty and independent niece, Beatrice. She is, perhaps, the only one who can match wits with Benedick, and the two are said to have a “merry war” between them. Or, as Leonato says of them, “They never meet but there’s some skirmish of wit between them.” So under the direction of Prince Don Pedro, the others in the group — Leonato, Claudio, Hero and Hero’s two waiting women, Margaret and Ursula — scheme to get Benedick and Beatrice to fall in love.

Things go well for all involved until the prince’s brother, Don John, plots to break up the relationship between Claudio and Hero and thereby to set his brother, the prince, against Leonato. And the plot might have worked were it not for the buffoonish yet surprisingly effective work of the constable Dogberry and his befuddled deputies.

In addition to the comic story in the play, Shakespeare also incorporated several dances in the play that will be performed as part of the production. So in addition to the speaking roles — 15 men, four women — there will be several non-speaking roles, some of which will require dancing. Many of the speaking roles will require some dancing as well. Ages for the characters range from high school to age 70.

Actors wishing to audition for the play will be asked to read from the script. Sunday's audition will also include some dancing.

A copy of the script — along with character descriptions, a list of the audition scenes and a tentative calendar for rehearsals and performance — may be found on the LTO website, littletheatreofowatonna.org. An audition application form may also be found on the website. Those interested in auditioning are encouraged to look at the audition material on the LTO website to prepare for the audition.

Copies of the audition material may also be found at the Owatonna Public Library or by contacting Jeffrey Jackson at 507-444-2371 or via email at jjackson@owatonna.com.

Performances of “Much Ado About Nothing” will be 7:30 p.m. April 21, 22, 28 and 29, with 2 p.m. matinees on April 23 and 30.