

*disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyen*

When you think of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, you think of Falstaff and Andrew Murton's portrayal certainly did not disappoint. He was by turns wicked, charming, conspiratorial, vainglorious, splendidly rotund and full of leers, winks and a hundred other facial expressions. However, he was not my star of the night, good though he undoubtedly was. Nor was another deserving contender, Alexander Gordon-Wood, for his side-splitting portrayal of Caius. No, for me, the star of the evening was Charles McGuire's incandescent rendition of Master Ford. Always on the edge of losing it, his lunatic frenzy when looking for Falstaff in the basket was quite something to behold.

The 'merry wives' themselves were excellently portrayed by Ellen Hardisty and Elizabeth Back. They went through the full gamut of reactions and emotions, from giggling schoolgirls to cool and in-control mistresses of the situation.

Director Marco Ghelardi kept the fast paced farce brilliantly on track as did the actors despite many a foray into the front rows to pick up food and, especially, wine. There was a really wonderful use of moving chairs; a very simple device, yes, yet extremely effective the way it was utilised. There was fantastic interplay with the audience as there usually is in this play. It was just really great fun from beginning to end which, of course, is exactly what it's supposed to be.

The actors all did extremely well, especially given the unfortunate recurrence of wind through the trees which gave them a highly intrusive noise level to overcome at times. This was particularly challenging as there was a good turnout spread across St John's garden's wide expanse. Consequently, the actors really had to go for it and I pitied their vocal cords and throats in the morning. It did not deter them; it seemed, in all honesty, as though nothing could quell the spirit they created.

On a personal note, my evening began by sitting by chance beside a previous work acquaintance from Germany that I did not know was even in the country who promptly bought my book. This attracted the attention of a gentleman, Oliver, behind us who did likewise. In our brief chat, I discovered, to my immense pleasure, that he had played in the all male cast of *Macbeth* in 1952 at Sadler's Wells with the wonderful John Barton. Somehow those meetings sum up much of the joy of the community that surrounds these performances each summer.

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