Theatre department shines through ‘As You Like It’ production over the week

C.J. Williams

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette Theatre Program filled The Burke Theatre to capacity on Thursday, Oct. 18 with students and professors who were treated to William Shakespeare’s comedic love story “As You Like It.”

The play, set in the fictional magic forest of Arden, follows the female lead Rosalind, played by Lexi Louviere, as she uses cleverness and disguises to eventually capture the love of male lead Orlando, played by Grant Broussard.

Other prominent characters—including Touchstone, played by John St. Clair, a court jester who provides consistent comedic relief throughout the play—fill out the cast.

Jonathan Kulp, Ph.D., director of the School of Music and Performing Arts, attended Thursday’s showing and said he thought the students did well.

“It’s a very difficult work,” said Kulp. “I’m proud of our students for committing to learn something like this and present it to their peers. I’m really pleased to see how well the audience responded to it because it’s hard for the audience and the actors.”

St. Clair as Touchstone was a standout for the audience and drew laughs.

One Attendee, mechanical engineering major Dawson Besson, said he was impressed with St. Clair and also complimented the cast’s ability to memorize such difficult verbiage.

“The guy who played the fool, you could tell he really enjoyed himself,” Besson said. “All of them really are so dedicated to their work. I honestly don’t know how they memorize their lines. It’s not easy, because it’s Shakespeare and it’s hard to understand.”

“For the actors, we start with the script and we analyze it,” said St. Clair. “Once we figure out what Shakespeare is trying to get us to say, we start memorizing it and putting our emotional connotations behind it. We have to work on our movements, our articulation and how loud we can project to people.”

St. Clair described how during rehearsals the cast was telling him he’d be a crowd favorite, but he “didn’t feel that way,” saying that most audiences don’t research before attending a Shakespearean play and that he was afraid the crowd would get bored with Touchstone. He said during the preparation process, he worked on incorporating physical activity and slapstick comedy to convey what he was trying to say, adding he wanted to utilize a wide range of emotions to drive home his role.

“For Touchstone, I put 100 percent of myself into creating him, and when that happens, it gets pretty exhausting,” St. Clair said. “When I got that response, I was at ease.”

Louviere described similar concerns for her performance of Rosalind, citing how certain words, such as “wit” or “honesty,” have different meanings in the context of Shakespeare compared to standard English. She said honesty meant “prudishness” and wit meant “sexual favor.”

Louviere also highlighted the main challenge of Rosalind’s character: the fact that she must constantly switch between three personas—the actual Rosalind, Ganymede (Rosalind posing as a male) and what she described as “fake Rosalind.”

“I had to work on knowing when I am each character because all of them are kind of different and if the audience doesn’t really know what I am doing, it becomes really muddled and confusing, and no one really gets it,” said Louviere. “Ganymede is Rosalind’s idea of what a man is like, and fake Rosalind is what boys think girls act like—but it’s what Rosalind thinks boys think girls act like.”

Louviere and St. Clair’s performances were just some examples of the work put in by the cast. An attendee Thursday wouldn’t have detected any confusion; the jam-packed Burke Theatre was engaged and receptive of the cast’s performance.

“Just knowing that I’m doing something for a reason,” Louviere said “Having that objective, pursuing that objective, and knowing, in the end, I’m going to get what I want because I tried so hard for it.”

Showtimes for “As You Like It” included Oct. 18-20 at 7:30 p.m. and Oct. 20-21 at 2 p.m. in the Burke Theatre of Burke-Hawthorne Hall.
All the world’s a stage:
The UL Lafayette Theatre Program brought Shakespeare’s love story “As You Like It” to life for students and guests.