

# Arts & Entertainment

## Twelfth Night: timeless entertainment

by Julie Desrosiers

Sometimes the most life-affirming experiences can happen at the theatre. Centuries have gone by and enormous upheavals and social changes have occurred since Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night*. Yet despite the years and the countless forms it has taken in

the past, the play lives with a fresh new face and renewed vigour upon the stage of the University of Ottawa's Theatre department.

What they have created is living theatre. "Or at least, we're trying," interjects Director Andrei Zaharia. His vision is in no small part the source of the pro-

duction's vitality. He attributes *Twelfth Night* with a timeliness that makes it as important a social commentary as any written today. "Our age is very similar to that of Shakespeare's. Just like in his time, we are in decline at the end of a period of prosperity after a long period of war." Indeed, the puritanical element of the

play works as a menace to the happiness of the main characters. The crux of the play is "a confrontation between the forces of life and the forces of austerity," Zaharia explained.

Beyond social commentary, there is another attraction to *Twelfth Night*: the play is incredibly funny. It runs the gamut of comedy from satire to slapstick, with characters whose flaws are all the more laughable by their very human nature. The honesty and energy of the characters which are the essence of the play's success keep this long and logistically complicated play flowing from beginning to end.

Add to it a set, by Art Penson, that is both striking and simple, and the vividly colourful costumes of Margaret Coderre-Williams and what is achieved is a play that is both truly authentic and original.

According to Zaharia, authenticity and not innovation or experimentation is the best goal for students when studying or presenting Shakespeare. For Zaharia, the cast and crew producing *Twelfth Night* has be-

process of learning not just about theatre, but about life, about everything," he explained.

Although Zaharia is a visiting professor and has worked primarily with professional theatre schools, he has very few complaints about working with students. He said "with the students, I become both teacher and director. But it is the play itself that teaches the most... The biggest problem with working with students, especially such a large cast, is gathering them all together. Everyone has different schedules. Some work outside the school. It becomes very complicated."

Still, once they are gathered together, their expertise and dedication pulls them into a solid cast and crew. The result is far more than mere entertainment (although there is plenty to be entertained by as well). The production is a celebration of love, happiness and the vital forces that, in our day as well as in Shakespeare's, lead a perilous existence in a contrary world.

*Twelfth Night* runs until Apr. 1 at 8 p.m. in Academic

