

THE
THEATRE
ROYAL
PLAYERS
NOTTINGHAM
PRESENT

MUCH
ADO

ABOUT
NOTHING

PROGRAMME

ABOUT THE THEATRE ROYAL PLAYERS



The Theatre Royal Players was formed in 2024 when we created *Hamlet: The Rest is Silence*, a co-production created through the long-standing partnership between the Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Performed on the Royal Concert Hall stage in June 2025, the production brought together actors from across Nottinghamshire to create a large-scale Shakespeare production in a professional theatre environment.

What began as a single project quickly became something more. Since then, the company has continued to grow, welcoming new members through open casting calls and workshops, and creating opportunities for people of all backgrounds and experience levels to make theatre together.



The Theatre Royal Players is not an amateur dramatic society in the traditional sense. Instead, it is a people's theatre company, run by the Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall, where curiosity, creativity and craft sit at the heart of everything we do.

Whether members join for the joy of performance, to deepen their understanding of theatre-making, or to develop professional skills, we create opportunities to learn through practice and collaboration.

Since 2025, the company has presented a rehearsed reading of *Pygmalion* as part of the Theatre Royal's 160th anniversary celebrations, the festive comedy *Inn Side Story*, and *Will and Testament*, an original production celebrating the life and works of Shakespeare.

With *Much Ado About Nothing*, we return to full-scale Shakespeare for the second time.

Beyond performance, members have participated in Stagecraft Studio workshops, delivered talks and practical sessions, curated an exhibition at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, and hosted a Shakespeare Open Mic Night.

As the company continues to grow, we look forward to discovering what comes next. Because for us, theatre is not just about performance.

It is about participation.

ABOUT

THE DIRECTOR



George Lamb joined Theatre Royal Players in 2024 and was cast as Horatio in our inaugural production, *Hamlet: The Rest is Silence*. Since then, he has appeared in every Theatre Royal Players production, making him a proud member of our unofficial "100% Club". Audiences may recognise him as Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion*, one of the shepherds in *Inn Side Story*, and Brutus in *Will and Testament*. While George is a seasoned director beyond Theatre Royal Players, *Much Ado About Nothing* marks his directing debut with the company. He secured the role after presenting a bold, imaginative and fully realised pitch for a fresh take on Shakespeare's comedy, combining a deep understanding of the text with a clear vision for how it could speak to modern audiences.

As both actor and director, George embodies much of what the Theatre Royal Players is about: curiosity, craft, collaboration and a willingness to embrace new creative challenges. Over the course of rehearsals he has guided the company with expertise, humour and generosity, steering the Players through their second full-scale Shakespeare production and helping to create an ensemble-led production packed with energy, invention and heart.

George's journey from cast member to director also reflects one of the central aims of Theatre Royal Players: to create opportunities for people to develop their skills, take on new challenges and discover new avenues for creativity within a professional theatre environment.

Alongside his work as a performer and now director, George has also contributed to the wider artistic life of the company, presenting a talk on Shakespeare and film and leading a workshop exploring music in Shakespeare's plays as part of the Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall Shakespeare Festival. His progression from performer to director demonstrates what can happen when talent, ambition and opportunity come together. We are delighted to see him take the director's chair for the first time and look forward to seeing where his creative leadership takes the company in the future.



ABOUT

THE VISION

I've always loved *Much Ado About Nothing*. It's one of my absolute favourite plays, and I've wanted to direct it for a long time, but the idea for this production came from somewhere I really wasn't expecting. One day, whilst in rehearsals for something completely different, it suddenly occurred to me that Benedick and Beatrice's constant wittering on at each other sounded not unlike two drag queens reading one another.

This unlocked something; what if we recontextualised *Much Ado* through a queer lens?

Shakespeare has been recontextualised into countless different worlds, periods and settings over the years, so why not allow this play to explore a world where gender and sexuality are a little more fluid?

That idea became particularly exciting during our audition process, when we opened the roles up to any gender and what was really fascinating was how it led to some interesting discoveries about the characters and their relationships.

At its heart, though, this is still the *Much Ado* we know and love. I would say it's a faithful translation which we have observed through a different lens.

The cast have been absolutely brilliant and incredibly collaborative throughout this process. They have really thrown themselves into the world of the show, taken risks, challenged ideas and, most importantly, had a lot of fun along the way.

I'm hugely grateful to every member of the company, to our Executive Producer Rebecca Morris, and to the Royal Centre for helping to make a long-held dream of mine come true and bringing this project to life. I hope you enjoy watching it as much as we've enjoyed making it.

George Lamb
Director



ABOUT

THE STORY

Act I

Following a successful military campaign, Don Pedro returns to Messina with members of the court, including Claudio, Benedick and Don John. Claudio quickly develops an affection for Hero, the child of Leonato, while the sharp-witted Beatrice and Benedick resume their long-standing war of words. As plans begin to form for a marriage between Claudio and Hero, Don Pedro and others become convinced that Beatrice and Benedick are secretly fond of one another, despite their constant claims to the contrary. Meanwhile, Don John begins to plot against the happiness of those around them.

Act II

A masked celebration creates opportunities for disguise, misunderstanding and intrigue. Claudio and Hero's intended marriage moves closer, while a scheme is set in motion to trick Benedick into believing that Beatrice is in love with them. Soon afterwards, Beatrice becomes the target of the same deception. As each reluctantly begins to reconsider their feelings, Don John's more dangerous plans continue to develop in the background.

Act III

The attempts to unite Beatrice and Benedick prove unexpectedly successful. However, Don John engineers a plot designed to convince Claudio that Hero has been unfaithful. Through carefully staged deception, Claudio is persuaded that the person they love has betrayed their trust. At the same time, the local Watch, led by the well-meaning but gloriously incompetent Dogberry, stumbles upon evidence that may expose the villain's scheme.

Act IV

On the day of the wedding, Claudio publicly denounces Hero before the assembled guests. The ceremony collapses into chaos, leaving Hero disgraced and the household divided. In the aftermath, a daring plan is proposed to uncover the truth and restore Hero's reputation. Meanwhile, Beatrice and Benedick finally confess their feelings for one another, but their newfound happiness is tested by the events unfolding around them.

Act V

Don John's deception is eventually revealed, thanks in large part to Dogberry and the Watch. Hero's innocence is established, Claudio must face the consequences of their actions, and a path towards forgiveness begins to emerge. As misunderstandings are cleared away and hidden truths come to light, the play moves towards reconciliation, celebration and one of Shakespeare's most joyful endings, proving that while much may be made of "nothing", love and truth have a habit of winning in the end.

Shakespeare originally wrote *Much Ado About Nothing* in a five-act structure. For this production, Theatre Royal Players present a specially edited two-act version, preserving the wit, romance and intrigue of the original while creating a pace and shape suited to a contemporary audience.

ABOUT

**THE
CAST**

Beatrice – Hatty Hunt-Blow

Benedick – George Davis

Claudio – Jess McWhirter

Hero – Emily Giles

Leonato – Gurmej Virk

Don Pedro – Tom Morley

Don John – Paula Heeley

Conrade – Collette Wong

Borachio – Rachel Elphick

Margaret – Elsa Kitching

Dogberry – Beth Yearsley

Verges – Ross Levy

Friar Frances – Chris Stevenson

Friar Frannie / Sexton – Roisin Kelly

Balthasar – George Lamb

Seacole – Karen Peckover

First Watchman – Kathy Bear

Second Watchman – Rob Chrich

Crew

Director – George Lamb

Production Coordinator – Rebecca Morris

Technical and FOH – TRCH Crew



ABOUT

THE
REHEARSALS



ABOUT

GENDER



Much Ado About Nothing is a play that invites us to think about gender, reputation and social expectations. Its characters navigate the pressures of belonging, acceptance and conformity, whether that is Benedick's resistance to marriage or Claudio and Hero's courtship within a society shaped by reputation, status and convention. In this production, we became interested in how those dynamics might shift if some of the characters' genders were reimagined. Rather than simply swapping roles, we wanted to explore how relationships, power and social expectations might be experienced from a different perspective.

We found ourselves asking how ideas of identity, acceptance and self-expression might resonate differently when viewed through a queer lens. Hero is also given additional text, borrowing lines from Ophelia in *Hamlet* to expand their voice within the story.

This approach is informed by a long tradition of reinterpreting Shakespeare. Plays such as *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* already explore disguise, mistaken identity and shifting perceptions of gender, while modern productions have continued to find new ways of examining identity, belonging and desire. It is also worth remembering that Shakespeare's plays were originally performed by all-male companies. Every female character, from Juliet to Cleopatra, was first played by a boy actor. While this does not mean Shakespeare was writing about sexuality and identity in the way we understand them today, it reminds us that theatre has always embraced transformation, imagination and the willingness to see familiar stories from new perspectives.

In recent years, many productions have continued to explore these possibilities. The Globe's 2019 all-female *Richard II*, the re-imagining of Mercutio as a drag queen in Baz Luhrmann's film adaptation of *Romeo + Juliet*, and the RSC's forthcoming all-male *As You Like It* all demonstrate how familiar stories can reveal new meanings when viewed through a different lens.

Closer to home, the Theatre Royal Players explored similar ideas in *Hamlet: The Rest is Silence*, which featured a female Hamlet and Ophelia.

What is perhaps most striking about these productions is that they continue to rely upon Shakespeare's words. New interpretations emerge not by replacing the text but by asking different questions of it. Changing the gender of a character or reframing a relationship can reveal details, tensions and possibilities that might otherwise go unnoticed. Whether Shakespeare himself anticipated these readings is ultimately less important than the conversations they inspire today. His plays have endured because they remain open to reinterpretation, allowing different generations to discover aspects of the stories that speak to their own experiences.

Rather than offering definitive answers, we hope this production encourages curiosity and conversation. If it prompts audiences to see something unexpected in a familiar story, or to discover a new perspective within Shakespeare's play, then it has achieved exactly what we hoped.

ABOUT

THE PLAY

Shakespeare's Sources

Like many of his plays, *Much Ado About Nothing* was not invented entirely from scratch. Shakespeare borrowed elements from several earlier Italian stories, particularly Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Both contain versions of the "false accusation" plot in which a young woman is wrongly accused of infidelity before her wedding.

What Shakespeare added was something entirely his own: Beatrice and Benedick. Their witty war of words, reluctant romance and emotional honesty have become the heart of the play and often overshadow the more conventional love story of Hero and Claudio. Scholars continue to debate exactly where Shakespeare found inspiration for them, but most agree that their relationship represents one of his most original creations.

Language

The title itself contains a joke. To modern ears, *Much Ado About Nothing* means making a great fuss over very little. However, Shakespeare's audience may also have heard a second meaning. "Nothing" sounded very similar to "noting", an Elizabethan word meaning observing, overhearing or eavesdropping.

This is fitting because the plot is driven by people watching, overhearing and misinterpreting one another. Characters fall in love because of conversations they secretly listen to, while others are deceived by staged scenes and false appearances.

The play is also famous for its wit. Beatrice and Benedick's exchanges are some of Shakespeare's sharpest verbal sparring, full of puns, insults and playful wordplay. Even more than four centuries later, their battle of words remains one of the most enjoyable relationships in Shakespeare's canon.

Messina: A Strategic Mediterranean City

Although Shakespeare's Messina is more theatrical than historical, it is based on a real Sicilian port city that played an important role in Renaissance Europe. Situated between Sicily and mainland Italy, Messina was a crossroads for trade, culture and military activity. Soldiers, merchants and travellers passed through its harbour, making it an ideal setting for a play concerned with reputation, status and the arrival of returning soldiers after war. The world of *Much Ado About Nothing* is shaped by honour and public perception.

Characters live under constant social scrutiny, where gossip spreads quickly and reputation can be won or lost in an instant. Messina provides a fitting backdrop for a story in which appearance, rumour and social standing carry enormous weight.



Coming Soon....

Marley Was Dead

"Marley was dead, to begin with." Well, mostly...

What if the events of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* happened by accident?

When Jacob Marley is released from his seven-year purgatory, he accidentally joins an afterlife support group populated by history and literature's most recognisable spirits. A festive competition to see who can stage the best haunting soon gets out of hand, setting in motion a host of literary hauntings and leading one miserly businessman towards an entirely unintended redemption. While Marley and the three Christmas Spirits focus their efforts on the stubborn Ebenezer Scrooge, other ghosts begin pursuing unfinished business of their own, with consequences that ripple across literature itself.

From castle battlements and Scottish battlefields to Victorian parlours and shadowy opera houses, *Marley Was Dead* uncovers the secret origins of literature's most famous hauntings

We all know why Scrooge was haunted – but what was in it for the ghosts?

Coming Christmas 2026....

Connect with the Theatre Royal Players

Have you enjoyed *Much Ado About Nothing* and would like to learn more about the Theatre Royal Players?

While our Christmas production, *Marley Was Dead*, has already been cast, there will be plenty of opportunities to get involved throughout the year. We regularly run workshops, talks, social events and creative projects for people interested in exploring theatre-making, developing skills and meeting like-minded performers.

We're also planning a recruitment evening in January, welcoming anyone interested in joining the company, whether you're an experienced performer or taking your first steps onto the stage.

To stay up to date:

- Join the Theatre Royal Players Facebook group: Theatre Royal Players, Facebook
- Contact Rebecca Morris: rebecca.morris@nottinghamcity.gov.uk
- Keep an eye on the Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall website, social media channels and season brochures for upcoming opportunities.

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