



REVIEW: Trio offers late-summer night's farce

BY MICHELLE PARKS

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FAYETTEVILLE — Shakespeare was never this much fun in school.

In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, three actors attempt to present all of Shakespeare's plays within their own 90-minute play.

The show opened Friday night to a sold-out crowd at the Walton Art's Center's 130-seat Nadine Baum Studios theater. Performances continue today and Thursdays through Sundays through Sept. 20.

The actors - Jim Goza, Jordan Haynes and Liam Selvey - kept their real names during the show-within-a-show, as they covered the comedies, tragedies, histories and sonnets. Theater's "fourth wall," or the separation between the action on stage and the audience, didn't exist in this show.

Audience members didn't have to know Shakespeare to enjoy the production, which wasn't a comprehensive primer on the Bard's more than 30 plays. The actors took them on a roller coaster ride through highlights of his works, employing scripted and improvised comedy along the way.

This show was performed in town 10 or so years ago. While that one was memorable, this production by TheatreSquared, the region's only professional theater company, was excellent.

Whether their true natures or just the characters they were playing, these three actors had distinct personalities that blended very well. Goza was nervous and a bit naive. Haynes was macho but also got his feelings hurt. And Selvey was the more calm voice of reason who tried to hold the show together.

They started with a parody of *Romeo and Juliet*, with Selvey as a lovely Juliet. The gory tragedy of *Titus Andronicus* was told through a cooking show, while *Othello* was handled with a rap song. After brief treatments of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth* was covered with some rough Scottish accents and a duel.

Because the plots of Shakespeare's comedies can be seen as similar, they combined all 16 of them into one - eventually settling on the title, *The Love Boat Goes to Verona*. They tried to make the history plays more interesting through the action of a football game, with the royal crown used as a football, being passed from one ruler to the next.

They made fun of Shakespeare's dialogue and the language of the day, while inserting references to current events and local culture. As a real treat, Selvey juggled daggers, then torches, while reciting two sonnets.

The show kept building in momentum and, just when the actors thought they'd covered all Shakespeare's works, they realized they'd forgotten *Hamlet*.

After much reluctance, Goza agreed to play his parts in this tragedy, which took up about the last third of the show. This also required some hilarious audience participation.

These guys were highly entertaining and funny with clever dialogue, physical comedy, ever-changing costumes and creative props. It was hard to tell what was and wasn't on-the-spot improvisation.

But when they got to the seriousness of reciting sonnets or monologues, they were solid, even moving. And Goza, the guy who'd just played a bunch of female roles (donning wigs and skirts), was very straightforward and sincere in his *Hamlet* monologue.

They went on to perform *Hamlet* three more ways, the first just a much faster version. They then presented the actions and lines in reverse, including, "Be to not, or be to," followed by a fastforward version that took mere seconds.

They left the audience satisfied and worn out from laughing at this energetic show.

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