

# Shakespeare worth seeing

MODERN interpretations of Shakespeare are rather like soap operas — you either love them or hate them.

So be warned, *Much Ado About Nothing* at the People's this week is just such a production.

Not one of the Bard's better comedies, *Much Ado* follows the familiar pattern of that genre — boy meets girl, boy falls for girl, tragedy strikes and girl pretends to be dead before a final reconciliation which inevitably ends with a host of marriages.

Given this limiting formula, it's doubtful whether dragging this play into the 20th Century has added anything to it.

The opening scene, which sees the main protagonists return from a successful military campaign, is a strong analogy of the Falklands conflict. But that connection is never fully exploited and the audience is left wondering whether they've missed some subtle political message.

The dialogue of this pro-

*Much Ado About Nothing*,  
People's Theatre, Newcastle  
By IAN WHITTELL

duction is still basically Elizabethan, and even though Christopher Goulding offers a show-stopping performance as a foolish constable with a strong Geordie accent, we've seen other Shakespearian figures portrayed with local dialects in more traditional interpretations.

## Strong

What the modernisation does provide is humour. A parody of a modern Royal wedding, and nice touches like music by Wham! and Dire Straits are all employed but are never intrusive.

If a little long at over three hours, strong performances by Roger Liddle (Don John), Maggie Kelly (Beatrice) and David Tarkenter (Claudio) and thoughtful direction by Chris Heckels and Eileen Squires make this version well worth seeing.

## THEATRE

# Much Ado makes for a fun evening

*Much Ado About Nothing*  
by William Shakespeare — at  
The People's Theatre until  
Saturday.

MUCH ado about  
nothing? Well ... er ...  
quite.

If, as I suspect, that was the audience reaction when it was first performed all those years ago, then little has changed over the centuries.

When the bard penned this teaser he was clearly throwing down the gauntlet to directors, players, viewers alike. Suspend belief, briefly cast aside common sense, make of it all what you will and have a good time. It's not meant to be serious, folks.

The company at The People's, under the direction of Chris Heckels and Eileen Squires, have risen to the challenge with this modern (well, mostly) dress production of the famous comedy.

Claudio and Hero are the couple whose fortunes are central to the plot — far too complex to relate here — which follows on the heels of a successful Naval campaign.

## Nonsense

It is implied that we should recall the Falklands, and perhaps put the protagonists in the role of Andy Fergie, but this is to fog the issue.

It certainly must have baffled the venerable gent in the back row last night, who had a volume of Shakespeare's complete works balanced on his knee.

There are many nice performances. David Tarkenter and Moira Valentine, as the betrothed couple, rise above the nonsense of the plot, while Christopher Goulding, as a supremely comic Dogberry, revels in it and earns most of the laughs.

Roger Liddle, a People's stalwart, is at his oiliest in the role of the unpleasant Don John.

The cast use the theatre to its utmost, spending as much time in the aisles as on stage during some scenes.

There are some rather painful musical interludes and the music emanating from the speakers is in keeping with the whole piece — rather whimsical. We have Dire Straits and even Wham! among other things.

Pauses between scenes could be cut drastically to shift things along but that is really a minor gripe. On the whole, this is a jolly and ultimately rewarding night out at the theatre.

DAVID WHETSTONE