

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

*As You Like It* is a play about a group of people who get lost in the Forest of Arden and end up finding themselves. Exiles from the court, they enter a frightening wilderness to discover an idyllic place of song, comradeship and love. For it is not physical danger that lurks in Arden but rather the mysteries of the human heart. The characters, one after the other, fall hopelessly in love. Shakespeare makes fun of both love and marriage while simultaneously celebrating the sheer joy and wonder of both.

There are four distinctive levels of love in *As You Like It*. The passion of the clowns Touchstone and Audrey is built upon base and impulsive desire. Their love is not destined to last—it is the fleeting union of lust and lasciviousness. The two rustics, Phoebe and Silvius, become caricatures of romantic pastoral lovers. They are head over heels with the idea of being in love but unable to move beyond the narcissistic pose of being lovers. The love of Celia and Oliver happens suddenly but is seemingly destined. They fall under the spell of the forest and declare their affection for each other.

Finally, we have Rosalind and Orlando. Rosalind experiences all of the aspects of love. She falls for Orlando at first sight and then her feelings move to a deeper level when his deeds match his outward characteristics. Rosalind possesses the self-awareness and the moral fortitude to control her impulses. Though inexperienced in the ways of romance, she intuitively understands that men—when the spirit is upon them—will swear to anything and perhaps even sincerely mean it at that moment. However, once the storm has passed and yearning has abated, the passion that was all-consuming quickly dissipates. Rosalind needs to know that the love Orlando professes is not merely of that superficial sort. She pities his suffering and his longings because they mirror her own, but she is resolute in her plan to fathom the depth and the quality of his feelings.

Rosalind, pretending to be the boy Ganymede, tests and taunts her future husband. She claims to possess a curative that will free him from his love sickness, but in fact it is the doctor herself who needs to be healed. And the only cure for love is marriage; a perilous undertaking that more often than not ends in mutual recrimination. Yet love is not to be denied and that is the crux of the matter. Rosalind knows she will love—that she will fall in the wrestling match of the sexes—but she wants to be sure her champion is worthy.

*As You Like It* is a play for romantics. The cynical, world-weary Jaques must depart at the end of the play. Jaques stands above the romantic fray, ruefully shaking his head at the idiocy of love that pervades Arden. He knows, perhaps from his own youthful experience, that love, like life itself, is ephemeral. But ironically this self-awareness stands between Jaques and any hope for happiness and fulfillment. Remaining apart, alienated and judgmental, he is unable to participate fully in the human enterprise. Shakespeare rejects his

perspective by celebrating the triumphant power of love and the sanctity of marriage.

*As You Like It* invites us— both actors and audience—to leave behind the mundane reality of our daily life and escape to a place of brotherhood, harmony and love. For a short while put aside your cares, set free your imagination, and soar along with us upon the poetry of Shakespeare.

**Edward Isser**