As You Like It
By William Shakespeare
Directed by Paul Mullins

Know-the-Show Audience Guide
researched and written by the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

Artwork by Scott McKowen
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William Shakespeare, widely recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare’s father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare’s childhood, though little is known about it for certain, appears to have been quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-upon-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592, he was a successful actor and playwright. He wrote approximately 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While the plays were well-liked, Shakespeare’s work was not considered by his educated contemporaries to be exceptional. By 1608, Shakespeare’s involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died in 1616.

Most of Shakespeare’s plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare’s death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the First Folio. Other early printings of Shakespeare’s plays were called quartos, a printer’s term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the First Folio texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare’s plays.
As You Like It
An Introduction

As You Like It is one of Shakespeare's most enduring and beloved comedies. As with many of his plays, Shakespeare drew characters and plot devices from existing stories, but skillfully made the play his own. From the repressive world of Duke Frederick's court to the more idyllic life of those exiled to the Forest of Arden, we see many facets of the human experience colorfully drawn in this play.

Thematically, Shakespeare hits on two major transformative influences on the human spirit: theatre and nature. From Rosalind's play-acting as Ganymede to the cooling effects of the forest on the banished nobles, As You Like It depicts how nature and an element of theatre brings a greater sense of self-awareness to the characters.

The courtly exiles in Arden, as well as the “true laborers” who inhabit the forest year-round, are exposed to hunger, weariness, and wild animals. But as Duke Senior describes, and Corin demonstrates, this exposure to the realities of life in the forest and away from court is itself a kind of education for those whose minds are open to learning from it.

Yet even as Arden is a real forest where shepherds huddle against the cold with tarred and greasy hands, it seems to be an equally magical realm in which every malevolence or mischance is converted to good. Each of the characters who comes to the forest is reformed or formed anew in some way: Duke Senior gains inner strength and wisdom; Orlando finds both love and trust in his fellow man; Rosalind discovers the power of her own voice and mind. As scholar Agnes Latham states in her introduction to the play:

The circle of this forest is a magic circle even though the magic does not take material forms... Its power to convert surpasses nature. When Oliver enters its confines he completely changes his character and in a twinkling of an eye becomes a fit lover for Celia. The usurping Duke fails even to enter. He lets fall his weapons as though there were some invisible barrier which evil cannot pass.

These transformations remind us not only of the magic of fairy tales but also the “magic” of the stage, most apparently through Rosalind's play-acting. Throughout the performance, the author reminds the audience is seeing a play. In the play's final moments, Shakespeare has the boy actor who would have played Rosalind entirely dismantle the boundary between acting and real life by speaking to the audience in his (or nowadays, her) real-life persona.

By encouraging the audience to cross this boundary, and by sending his main characters back into the “real world” of the court, Shakespeare affirms the value of both “playing” in the theatre and “escaping” into the natural world. Both are magical experiences that counterbalance and enrich our everyday lives in society.
As You Like It
A Short Synopsis

Please note: Below is a full summary of the play. If you prefer not to spoil the plot, consider skipping this section.

Duke Senior has fled into exile from his usurping brother, Frederick. Duke Senior’s daughter Rosalind, however, has been permitted to remain in the court as a friend to Duke Frederick’s daughter, Celia.

Orlando, the youngest son of Sir Roland de Boys, is cruelly forced to live the life of a servant by his elder brother, Oliver. Furious, Orlando demands that Oliver give him the small inheritance promised in their father’s will. Oliver refuses and begins to plot a way to get rid of his younger brother. In the meantime, Orlando valiantly wins a wrestling match at the court of Duke Frederick, and in doing so catches the eye of Rosalind who gives him a necklace as a token of her affection. Orlando returns home to discover that Oliver is plotting against his life. He escapes with his elderly servant Adam into the Forest of Arden.

Immediately following the wrestling match, Duke Frederick voices his displeasure with Rosalind and accuses her of usurping the people’s affection for Celia. He banishes Rosalind. Celia’s love for and loyalty to her cousin Rosalind compel her to defy her father, and the women decide to flee to the forest of Arden to seek out Rosalind’s banished father. For their safety, they disguise themselves: Celia as a young country wench, Aliena, and Rosalind as a young man, Ganymede. The ladies also take with them Touchstone, the court fool. Furious at his daughter’s disappearance, Duke Frederick suspects that Orlando is somehow involved, and orders Oliver to find his brother and take him prisoner.

Deep in the Forest of Arden, Rosalind’s exiled father, Duke Senior, contemplates his life away from the court. He encourages his lords to see and appreciate the merits of the simple life they now lead. The melancholy Jaques seems to be the only follower who is distressed and dissatisfied. As the lords prepare to dine, Orlando rushes in with weapon drawn, demanding food for Adam, who is on the verge of death. Duke Senior tells him there is no need for violence and invites Orlando and Adam to join the gathering. Orlando discovers that the host is, in fact, Duke Senior, who was a close friend of his deceased father.

Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone arrive in the Forest of Arden exhausted, with no food or shelter. They come upon an elderly shepherd, Corin, who informs them that his master is preparing to sell all of his lands. They offer to buy the property and hurry off to their new home.

Rosalind and Celia discover love poems addressed to Rosalind pinned to trees throughout the forest. The author of these verses is none other than the young Orlando, whom Rosalind fell in love with at court. When Orlando comes upon the ladies’ home, Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) teases him and vows
SEARCHING FOR ARDEN

Much debate has focused on the idyllic Forest of Arden. In the source material, the story takes place in France, which suggests that Shakespeare may have been thinking of the wooded region of Ardennes, on the border between modern-day France and Belgium. Others have argued that the quintessentially English nature of the country-dwellers depicted in the play indicate that the Bard was thinking of the Forest of Arden located just north of his hometown of Stratford-on-Avon. Still others believe that the naming of the forest was to honor his mother, Mary Arden.

bloody handkerchief, which Oliver has brought with him as proof of the encounter. As they help Rosalind back to the house, it is clear that Oliver and Celia have instantly fallen in love. Rosalind rushes to see her wounded love. When Orlando bemoans the fact that he still does not have Rosalind, Ganymede (Rosalind) vows that, through magic, he will conjure up the real Rosalind and Orlando shall marry her the next day. Ganymede also vows to help Silvius and Phoebe find happiness if they will meet together at the wedding of Oliver and Celia.

When the various couples gather as Ganymede has instructed them, Rosalind appears as herself before the group, and all the lovers are happily married. As the celebration ensues, a messenger announces that Duke Frederick has led troops to the Forest to attack Duke Senior and his compatriots, but that an encounter with a religious man at the Forest’s border has converted him from his tyrannous ways. It is revealed that Duke Frederick has restored all land, titles, and power to Duke Senior and his men. As the retinue prepares to return to court following the celebration, Jaques announces that he will remain to seek out Duke Frederick and learn from his penitent reformation.

to “cure” him of his love-sickness, if he pretends that she is actually his beloved Rosalind. Orlando takes Ganymede’s challenge, not because he wants to be cured, but because he says he finds the distraction comforting.

While awaiting Orlando’s return, Rosalind comes upon Silvius, a lovesick shepherd, chasing after Phoebe, a shepherdess. Disdaining the cruelty with which Phoebe treats her loyal shepherd, Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) steps in and attempts to convince her to accept Silvius’ vows of love. Phoebe, however, falls immediately in love with the young Ganymede, not realizing that “he” is actually a she.

Orlando arrives an hour late for his first meeting with Ganymede, or “Rosalind.” After she berates him, she advises Orlando about love. Elsewhere in the forest, Touchstone has fallen in love with Audrey, a country shepherdess. He swears to marry her and chases away William, a would-be rival suitor. Orlando again fails to arrive on time for a meeting with Rosalind. As she and Celia discuss Orlando’ questionable faithfulness, Silvius enters with a letter from Phoebe in which she proclaims her love for Ganymede. Crushed, Silvius returns to Phoebe at Ganymede’s urging.

Oliver arrives with a message from Orlando for Rosalind (Ganymede). He informs Rosalind and Celia that after leaving them last, Orlando was injured while saving Oliver from a hungry lion. Rosalind swoons at the sight of Orlando’s bloody handkerchief, which Oliver has brought with him as proof of the encounter. As they help Rosalind back to the house, it is clear that Oliver and Celia have instantly fallen in love. Rosalind rushes to see her wounded love. When Orlando bemoans the fact that he still does not have Rosalind, Ganymede (Rosalind) vows that, through magic, he will conjure up the real Rosalind and Orlando shall marry her the next day. Ganymede also vows to help Silvius and Phoebe find happiness if they will meet together at the wedding of Oliver and Celia.

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Who’s Who in the Play

THE COURT OF DUKE FREDERICK:

Duke Frederick: Duke Senior’s younger brother and usurper; Celia’s father.

Rosalind: Duke Senior’s daughter. After being banished by her uncle, she disguises herself as a boy and escapes to the Forest of Arden disguised in search of her father. In the forest, she encounters Orlando, the young man she fell in love with during the wrestling match.

Celia: Duke Frederick’s daughter; Rosalind’s cousin and best friend. Celia chooses to follow Rosalind into exile disguised as a maid named Aliena.

Touchstone: a court fool who accompanies Rosalind and Celia to the Forest of Arden and there falls in love with Audrey.

Le Beau: a courtier in the court of Duke Frederick.

Charles: a skilled wrestler, beaten by Orlando.

THE DE BOYS HOUSEHOLD:

Orlando: the youngest son of Sir Roland. Orlando catches Rosalind’s eye during a wrestling match, but then must flee into the Forest of Arden to escape his brother’s plot against his life.

Oliver: the eldest son and heir of the deceased Sir Roland; he persecutes his brother, Orlando, but eventually undergoes a total transformation in the Forest of Arden.

Jacques De Boys: the middle brother of Oliver and Orlando.

Adam: a faithful old servant of the De Boys family who follows Orlando into exile.

THE EXILED COURT OF DUKE SENIOR:

Duke Senior: Duke Frederick’s older brother and Rosalind’s father; he has been banished by his brother and lives in the idyllic Forest of Arden.

Jaques: one of Duke Senior’s followers; he is often melancholy and critical.

Amiens: a lord and musician among the exiled lords.

IN THE FOREST OF ARDEN:

Corin: an old shepherd.

Silvius: a shepherd desperately in love with, but scorned by, Phoebe.

Phoebe: a shepherdess who scorns the love of the shepherd Silvius; falls in love with the disguised Rosalind.

Audrey: a shepherdess, and Touchstone’s love interest.

William: a country man who is smitten with Audrey.

Sir Oliver Martext: a country curate.

Hymen: the God of marriage who officiates the weddings at the end of the play.

Rosalind (Safiya Kaijya Harris), disguised as Ganymede, attempts to counsel the love-struck Phoebe (Devin Conway). Photo: Joe Guerin ©2019.
As You Like It was probably written in 1599 or 1600. It does not appear in the list of Shakespeare’s plays that was published by Francis Meres in 1598. In 1600, however, Shakespeare’s acting company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, prevented the play from being published in order to keep it from being staged by other companies. It was finally published in the First Folio edition of Shakespeare’s plays in 1623.

Shakespeare based As You Like It on a popular novel of the day, Rosalynde by Thomas Lodge, which was published in 1590. The novel was itself based on an earlier poem, “The Cook’s Tale of Gamelyn.” The novel Rosalynde clearly belongs to the genre known as pastoral romance, of which Sir Philip Sidney’s Arcadia is the best-known example. Pastoral romance was developed in classical Greece and Rome, and was revived by a number of Renaissance authors in Europe, including the Italian poet Petrarch.

As with Rosalynde, the typical pastoral romance was written for educated courtiers and nobility, and presented an idealized vision of country life – a golden world in which shepherds and shepherdesses frolic and speak in poetry. Love was almost always the main topic of the pastoral — a romance between the country folk; or the love of a suave gentleman for some simple but adorable country girl; or a romance between two nobles who, for some implausible reason find themselves temporarily in the country, having to deal with country life. Because the pastoral romance, being based on a classical model, was considered “high literature,” the courtiers and shepherds alike tend to speak in complex classical allusions and Latin proverbs.

While Shakespeare follows the basic plot of Lodge’s Rosalynde and uses many of its main characters, he also makes some significant changes. The characters of Touchstone and Jaques, as well as Audrey, Amiens, William, and LeBeau, were invented by Shakespeare. The long introductory sections of Lodge’s story were significantly cut by Shakespeare, who moves the action of the play very quickly to the Forest of Arden. The play’s villains, Oliver and the Duke Frederick, are significantly less villainous than in Lodge’s version, and Shakespeare presents the young lovers more realistically than Lodge’s models of courtly elegance.

In fact, Shakespeare’s play seems to be in some ways a gentle parody of its source and the genre of pastoral romance. The many love sonnets of Lodge’s version reappear in Shakespeare as the comically bad love poetry of Orlando. The Touchstone-Audrey and Phoebe-Silvius subplots present less than perfect versions of romance and mock the hyper-romantic Petrarchan ideal. Rosalind, for her part, seems much more interested in winning Orlando’s respect than his starry-eyed adoration.

Since the day the Lord Chamberlain’s Men succeeded in restricting production rights to the play, As You Like It has been one of Shakespeare’s most popular and most frequently produced plays. Rosalind has the longest role of any of Shakespeare’s
female characters, and has become a favorite part for actresses. In 1961, at age 24, Vanessa Redgrave launched her acting career into stardom by playing a barefoot, tomboyish Rosalind in Stratford, England. Other famous Rosalinds over the years have included Katherine Hepburn, Maggie Smith, Helen Mirren, Helena Bonham Carter, and even Adrian Lester in an award-winning 1991 all-male production with Cheek by Jowl Theatre Company at the Royal Shakespeare Company. Beloved by critics and audiences alike, As You Like It seems to have led many to agree with George Saintsbury’s 1898 remark that the play is “one of the topmost things in Shakespeare, the masterpiece of romantic comedy, one of the great type-dramas of the world.”

When in disguise, Rosalind says she will take on the name of “Jove’s own page, Ganymede”. Ganymede is drawn from a Greek myth in which Zeus finds himself taken with the beauty of a young man by that name. In an allusion to the myth, “Ganymede” was an Elizabethan-era synonym for “homosexual”.

The son of Aphrodite and Dionysus, Hymen was the god of marriage in both the Greek and Roman traditions. Some forms of Greek myth assert that, in order to keep in close contact with his love, who was of a much higher social status and therefore deemed an inappropriate match, Hymen disguised himself as a woman at a female religious procession. When the attendants of the procession, including Hymen and his love, were kidnapped by pirates, Hymen convinced his female fellow captives to revolt. He promised their safe return in exchange for the ability to marry the woman he loved, and the remarkable happiness of their marriage granted him his title.
The Truth in the Lie: “Like other comic places, Arden is a place of discovery where the truth becomes clear and where each man finds himself and his true way. This discovery of the truth in comedy is made through errors and mistakings. The trial and error by which we come to knowledge of ourselves and of our world is symbolized by the disguisings which are a recurrent element in all comedy, but as we have already seen particularly common in Shakespeare’s. Things have, as it were, to become worse before they become better, more confused and farther from the proper pattern. By misunderstandings men come to understand, and by lies and feignings they discover truth.”

– Helen Gardner, in Shakespeare: The Comedies

A Popular Heroine: “The popularity of Rosalind is due to three main causes. First she only speaks blank verse for a few minutes. Second, she only wears a skirt for a few minutes (and the dismal effect of the change at the end to the wedding dress ought to convert the stupidest champion of petticoats to rational dress). Third, she makes love to the man instead of waiting for the man to make love to her—a piece of natural history which has kept Shakespeare’s heroines alive, whilst generations of properly governessed young ladies, taught to say ‘No’ three times at least, have miserably perished.”

– George Bernard Shaw, Shaw on Shakespeare

Remarkable Rosalind: “Of all Shakespeare’s comic heroines, Rosalind is the most gifted, as remarkable in her mode as Falstaff and Hamlet in theirs.”

– Harold Bloom, in Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human

In Men’s Clothes: “In male garb, Rosalind automatically becomes the dominant figure...She restrains Touchstone’s arrogance and disparages Jaques’ melancholy; she chides Silvius and Phoebe; she is flip with her father. Above all, she is able to speak to Orlando about love without coyness or concealment, without having to defend against romantic or erotic attitudes or demonstrations. In short, she can be a person.”

– Marilyn French, Shakespeare’s Division of Experience

Know Your Absurdity: “Indeed, the golden assurance of the conquering good in love that this play presents is necessarily connected with the assumption that lovers are absurd; to know one’s own absurdity, yet not to be oppressed by it, indeed to enjoy it, is the basis of romantic heroism as the play shows it.”

– G. K. Hunter, Shakespeare: The Later Comedies

Audrey (Elizabeth Colwell) and Touchstone (Nick Corley). Photo: Joe Guerin ©2019.
SEEING A PLAY VS. HEARING A PLAY
Modern audiences go to the theater to see a play, but Shakespeare’s audiences would go to the theatre to hear a play. His audience was much more attuned to the language of the play, the inflections of the actors’ voices, and rhythms of the poetry. This is not to say that Shakespeare’s plays lacked visual interest, just that the visual elements were not nearly as important as the language.

We see this is, in some ways, true today, at least in the words we use to describe attending the theatre. People who attend the theater are most often referred to as an “audience” sharing the root of audio or sound in the name. Conversely, people who attend movies are often referred to as “movie-goers;” sports enthusiasts are often referred to as “spectators.”

WHAT DO I WEAR?
People often ask if shows at The Shakespeare Theatre will be performed in “traditional dress” or “like real Shakespeare.” This comes up even more often with the history plays.

It is interesting to note that, though often sumptuous and expensive, the costumes used in Shakespeare’s plays were rarely correct to the period of the play. Most often, actors were dressed in their finest attire (or clothes donated by wealthy patrons), and then these clothes were adorned with capes or crowns or other items denoting the character’s status. The shows in Shakespeare’s day were simply put up too quickly to create elaborate period-accurate costumes for the full company, nor did they have the money to do so. Therefore, despite popular assumption, a more accurate “traditional dress” approach to Shakespeare plays would be to dress actors in their finest contemporary clothing adorned with capes and crowns to denote status.

There were also very strict laws in Shakespeare’s day detailing what clothes, styles, and colors citizens were allowed to wear. This was a deliberate maneuver to reinforce the class structure of the era. Penalties for violating these Sumptuary Laws could be quite severe — loss of property, imprisonment, fines, and even loss of title. These Sumptuary Laws meant that fashionable clothes could only be worn by the wealthy and were often only seen at a distance.
In this Production

Director: Paul Mullins
Scenic Designer: Brittany Vasta
Costume Designer: Nikki Delhomme
Lighting Designer: Tony Galaska
Sound Designer: Drew Weinstein

ABOVE LEFT: Phoebe (Devin Conway) and Silvius (Ryan Woods).
ABOVE: Duke Frederick (Earl Baker, Jr.).
LEFT: Orlando (Ben Jacoby) challenges Charles the Wrestler (Jonathan Higginbotham) as members of the court look on.

Explore Online

Members of the cast of the 2013 Royal Shakespeare Company discuss their views of the play:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5cRfOrwhoM

Fiona Shaw leads a documentary about *As You Like It* which includes interviews with numerous actors and directors who discuss the play.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bTIH-EQSJE&feature=youtu.be

Ben Crystal discusses the “bright and beautiful English of Shakespeare” and demonstrates how the verse would have sounded in Shakespeare’s day.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2QYGEwM1Sk
Sources & Further Reading

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THE COMPLETE IDIOT’S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE, by Laurie Rozakis

FREEING SHAKESPEARE’S VOICE by Kristin Linklater

THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein

LECTURES ON SHAKESPEARE by W. H. Auden

THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer

SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce

SHAKESPEARE AFTER ALL by Marjorie Garber

SHAKESPEARE FOR BEGINNERS by Brandon Toropov

SHAKESPEARE FOR DUMMIES by Doyle, Lischner, and Dench

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SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE, Consultant Editors Keith Parsons and Pamela Mason

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THEATRE: A WAY OF SEEING, Third Edition by Milly S. Barranger

THE ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK, by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding

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SHAKING HANDS WITH SHAKESPEARE, by Alison Wedell Schumacher