

## University theater program bringing 'Twelfth Night' to campus stage

11/01/06

The Division of Performing Arts at Alfred University will stage Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," opening Wednesday, Nov. 15, and running through Saturday, Nov. 18, in the C.D. Smith Theatre in the Miller Performing Arts Center on campus. Reservations are recommended and may be made by calling 607.871.2828, or going to <http://las.alfred.edu/per...> and clicking on "Box Office." Tickets are \$5 general admission and \$3 for area students. Alfred University students are admitted for \$1. All performances begin at 8 p.m. William Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," or "What You Will," is one of the bard's best-loved comedies. The play is simultaneously sweetly genteel and raucously crude. The audience is invited into the world of Illyria, an island awash with excessive emotion, strong feelings, teasing, and tomfoolery. Of Shakespeare's reputed 37 plays, "Twelfth Night" is the only one with a multiple-choice title. The doubled title bespeaks the doubling of the confusion in Illyria, when shipwrecked and separated twins arrive at different times, but encounter the same people of the town without anyone realizing there are two of them. Disguises are devised and mistaken identities promoted leading to further uncertainty and greater comic confusion. The Alfred University production of "Twelfth Night" is directed by theater professor Dr. Becky Prophet, with scenery and costumes designed by Marketa Fantova, assistant professor of theater design, and lighting by Carlos E. Bido, assistant technical director. Sophomore Kate Naron of Oswego plays the dual roles of Viola and Cesario, while Matt Mingle of Turbotville, PA is her equally shipwrecked twin brother. Caitlin Casey, a sophomore from Edina, MN, plays the lovely and cool Olivia. Senior John Kalish from Newburgh portrays the Duke of Illyria. Jeff Baxter, a sophomore from Lansing, leads the carousing in Olivia's household as Sir Toby Belch. Maria, created by senior Lily Katz of Philadelphia, tries to tame him and finally woos him. Sophomore April Nell of Box Elder, SD, plays Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Toby's faithful drinking companion. Amanda Holland, a sophomore from Lakewood, OH, portrays Feste, the clown. Senior Jared Hilliker from Greenfield, MA, takes the stage as Malvolio, one of the most remarkable characters in Shakespeare. Bryan Farthing of Annapolis, MD, and Carrie Steere of Almond are sea captains who fish the nearly drowned twins from stormy waves, miles apart. Fabian, sophomore Caitlin Gallagher from Carlisle, PA, creates a kind of clown-in-training. Kenny Moss of Maine, NY; Bryce Rammner-Young of Philadelphia; Karen Aldrich of Franklin, MA; Meryl A. Stone of Hebron, CT; Amy DeNisco of Fairfield, CT; Cortney Bryant of Lynden, WA; and Michelle Courter of Centereach, NY, play servants, townspeople, and other characters. Prophet lends some detail about "Twelfth Night." "Shakespeare's plot, perhaps borrowed from pre-Renaissance Italian sources, suggests the inversions of power and lack of propriety that washed over the society in England and elsewhere in Europe near the time of the winter solstice, said Prophet. Zany behaviors, midnight drunken bouts, hilarious arguments, specious challenges, terrified duelers, and silly songs rule two households on the island with the same vigor that the Lord of Misrule convened and conducted Twelfth Night festivities in Shakespeare's England, she explained. Echoes of the Roman Saturnalia festival and the northern European Feast of Fools resonate throughout the complicated, careening plot, said Prophet. "Conventional calm returns only when the ruling nobility give up their overweening feelings and find true love. Duke Orsino, who begins the play with the famous 'If music be the food of love, play on' must eschew the besotted emotion of being in love with love. Olivia, the original object of his affections, must abandon her plans for a daily a daily crying jag. She has planned to mourn her father and her brother in that manner, for seven years, during which time she will spurn the company of all men." "Twelfth Night" centers on some of Shakespeare's most beloved comic characters. Maria, the clever, pert maid, leads Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in tricking and befuddling the dour, pompous Malvolio. Feste, the clown sings to Olivia's house as well as Orsino's while jesting all across the island. Plucky Viola arrives in Illyria and quickly finds a station through her disguise as a man. Almost every character hides something or dupes someone else. Certainly most are engaged in excessive behavior in some way or another, lending credence to Shakespeare's lines in the world of this play "Care's an enemy to life" or "God give them wisdom that have it; and those that are fools, let them use their talents." Most famous, of course is the line with which Maria goads Malvolio into another kind of excess altogether: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em," convincing the pompous steward that Olivia is in love with him and thus promoting his playing the fool for the entire household. Here the play moves from its light and festive atmosphere into one of edgier darkness focused on practical jokes, their inherent cruelty and meanness of spirit. At the end, said Prophet, "as lovers are matched to one another and we are sure that domestic tranquility will prevail in Illyria, we are reminded, through Malvolio's justified outburst 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!' that foolishness often results in

unforeseen and possibly dire consequences."Written around 1601, "Twelfth Night" has delighted audiences for more than four centuries, parading marvelous characters through the entangled twin plots. Numerous film and television productions, as well as hundreds of stage versions have made this one of Shakespeare's most performed comedies in modern times. It is out of the same tradition as "Much Ado About Nothing" and "As You Like It," all plays that let us believe that life can be enjoyed through carefree love. In these plays life becomes dark and dangerous in the face of excess or when civility and generosity are manipulated unfairly or withheld entirely from other human beings.