

## The Castle Players' Shakespeare in Love – A Summer Triumph Under the Stars

It's a joy to see *The Castle Players* return to the open air with this year's production of *Shakespeare in Love*, performing from July 1st to 5th. Not only does this mark a welcome return to outdoor performing for the beloved community theatre group, but this year's tour across the region makes it their most accessible production to date. No longer confined to the grounds of the Bowes Museum, this roving summer spectacular brings the magic of theatre to audiences far and wide — and what a treat it is.

Directed with verve and vision by Gordon Duffy-McGhie, the production is a light-footed, effervescent delight. His direction allows the pace to remain buoyant and playful throughout, capturing the romantic whimsy and backstage chaos that makes *Shakespeare in Love* so beloved. From start to finish, there's an infectious joy that radiates from the cast — a testament to the enthusiasm and dedication of the entire company.

The story follows the Oscar winning movie of the late 90's — young Will Shakespeare needs to write a comedy and fast. He's in debt, has writers block and rapidly losing hope, that is until he finds his muse, Viola and suddenly all the pieces seem to fit into place, well, almost.

Oliver Smith shines as the young Will Shakespeare, bringing charm, energy, and just the right touch of poetic longing to the role. As Viola De Lesseps, Phoebe Lorenz is radiant — equal parts spirited and sincere — effortlessly capturing the heart of both the playwright and the audience. The chemistry between Smith and Lorenz is palpable and anchors the production beautifully.

There's strong comic support throughout: Ben Pearson's flustered Henslow is a joy to watch, while Matthew Humphrys delivers a wonderfully theatrical Richard Burbage. Sam Straker adds charisma and wit as the doomed yet brilliant Kit Marlowe, and Sam Philipson's wide-eyed Sam, a young actor finding his way, offers many heartfelt moments. Edward Handley's John Webster is filled with impish delight and adds a darkly humorous thread, while Emily Humphrys cuts an imperious figure as Queen Elizabeth I, commanding attention with every entrance. Totalling over 30 strong, the ensemble and choir ensure that this production has a grand feel, very capable of filling the summer evening with song and action.

One of the show's most impressive feats is the staging itself. Built to adapt to multiple venues, the set — designed by Bethany Nutley and Emily Harrington — blends beautifully with each open-air location. It's both clever and unobtrusive, allowing the natural world to become part of the performance, with birdsong and breezes joining the soundscape in spontaneous harmony.

*Shakespeare in Love* is a glorious celebration of theatre, love, and imagination. Don't miss your chance to be swept away by this enchanting production. Bring a chair, pack a picnic, and prepare to be entertained like never before — tour info and tickets available from [www.castleplayers.co.uk](http://www.castleplayers.co.uk)

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> July Mickleton Village

Friday 4<sup>th</sup> July Teesdale Community Resource, The Hub, Barnard Castle

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July Raby Castle.