

Director's Notes

Messina is Shakespeare's vessel for character eavesdropping and deception, naughty innuendos, and a dwelling place for deep-rooted female discrimination. Reputation and status in the Elizabethan era was an ultimate factor in society, and we can see this through Don Pedro and Don John the bastard's differences in privileges. Women were inferior and treated as property (Benedick referred to female characters many times as a 'dish'). Thus I thought that it was imperative to recreate this notorious Elizabethan Messina, with the same fashion and style that was the norm in Shakespeare's time. This is so that his concepts would be authentic to the modern audience because the production is in context with Shakespeare's initial vision for the play.

Alex effectively conveys ideas about the play in the director's notes

Set Design

There are few things in the set that will not be changed for the duration of the play.

Much Ado About Nothing mainly explores the concept of a man's perception of women. I plan to place a tiled, checkerboard pattern in the centre of the stage. The chessboard pattern depicts the play's similarity to a chess game— characters such as Hero obey their male guardians (e.g. Leonato tells Hero: 'if the prince solicit you in that kind, you know your answer' when he learns of Don Pedro's possible interest in marrying Hero). The chess can also represent women as 'objects of possessions (women have been referred to as a 'dish') that can be sacrificed (Hero was recommended to die: ' Death is the fairest cover for her shame') to save the character's own reputation(Leonato). This represents the gender equality of the period.

Clear justification of choices made in set design

The stage should be like a rectangular 'pit' area with stairs at the back, which should level out into an alcove that could be changed into a fireplace, an altar or a normal wall (which allows the actors to enter upstage). Stage left and right would have light brown— coloured curtains which reveal a rectangular hole of hedge simulating a garden. In the centre of the stage and in the middle of the chessboard pattern, a circular trapdoor allowing miniature water feature to be raised to stage level. A large 'tree' will be wheeled onto stage when the characters are in the garden and performing the gulling scenes. Beatrice and Benedick can hide behind the tree in this scene.

Lighting

At the beginning of the play the medium— bright lighting using golden tones will establish a celebratory mood and it will not focus on any character. This setting will remain the same until Don John's performance, when the lighting will be dimmed to create a sinister atmosphere. During the masked ball scene, the lighting will be bright again to create a happy atmosphere but dimming when individual characters speak. During the garden scene, the brightness of the stage will be at its fullest to reflect the sunlight and

The technical production is well connected to audience and mood with straightforward use of lighting

foreshadow the humorous gulling scene. When Beatrice and Benedick perform their soliloquy (Beatrice: 'love on, I will requite thee' and Benedick: 'why it must be requited'), their characters are lit will be dimmed slightly so that the audience is focused on them.

The Song 'Hey Nonny Nonny'

I intend for the song (sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more) to be a prominent aspect of the play which highlights Shakespeare's message about men—that they are indecisive, and conveys the concept of deception. When the Song is first sung by Balthasar and accompanied by his mandolin, the tempo will be slow so the lyrics can be clearly projected to the audience. Later I would like the Song to be sung again during the marriage scene of Beatrice and Benedick and Claudio and Hero. This time, the song will be lively, with a fast tempo. As the last thing heard in the play I intend to make an impression on the audience, so that they can understand its significance in conveying the concept that men are not as perfect or superior as they are deemed to be.

Character Performance

I would like each character to elicit some strong reaction from the audience. To be able to achieve this, the actor's performance must correlate with each character's personalities.

Beatrice is the classic example of a feminist who believes that women are equal to men. My intention is for Beatrice to be viewed as passionate, loyal and a feminist. Highlighting her banter scenes (banter with messenger scene 'he is no less than a stuffed man,') and by using many head gestures such as a slight tilt of her head when she is mocking a character and the utilisation of sharp head turns will portray her as attentive. Beatrice does not need to use many hand gestures (only when she is using a prop) because her witty remarks are enough to jest and project her opinions thus showing her superior intellect. The depiction of passion will be shown through her body language. A prime example is the 'Shunning of Hero' scene. When Beatrice becomes enraged, she will clench her jaw and fists and her body will be stiff, showing her vicious 'masculine' side. Beatrice's character should function as a role model of an independent and strong woman who would be identifiable in today's society.

Benedick adds the comedy elements in the play and is the counterfoil for Beatrice. He goes through a complex evolution from a man with a strong opposition to love and marriage to a person who is in love and is enthusiastic with this change. His character before the change mocks the notion of love and women, and will utilise exaggerated dynamic and tone changes when he speaks. Benedick will act in a stubborn manner when Don Pedro and Claudio are discussing marriage ('I will live a bachelor.'). I want the actor portraying Benedick to feign outrage by using strong language and a loud indignant voice when Benedick says 'the prince's fool!'. My intention is to exhibit Benedick to the audience as ignorant about Beatrice's affections for him and to do this, he will seem genuinely surprised during the gulling scene-

Thorough knowledge, understanding and interpretation of characters' roles

utilising exaggerated facial expressions (raised eyebrows, open mouth and jaw). During his transition into man in love (Benedick's soliloquy after the gulling scene), I would like Benedick to seem as if he is re-evaluating himself using questioning tones and pitch and volume changes. As a changed man, he becomes passionate and shows himself concerned with others (Hero and Beatrice). I would like the audience to understand this change in his personality, especially when he threatens Claudio to a duel. His tone becomes serious and lacks wit and mockery. This scene should juxtapose the acting scenes where he is jesting about love.

Hero will be portrayed as the 'typical Elizabethan woman.' She is docile and submissive, only speaking when it is her cue, ('I will father'). She will use a soft, sweet voice and a tone that is pleasant. Her volume range will be quite small, mostly using a soft dynamic tone for most of the time. She is an agreeable person, so she would smile and sometimes perhaps giggle at appropriate places. This sweet innocent acting from the actor of Hero allows the 'shunning of Hero' scene to be extremely dramatic and cruel. I would like the audience to feel sorry for Hero, and to do this, Hero should be portrayed as distraught and weak - crying and fainting, which utilises a high, sobbing voice and many hand gestures that covers her face to show her shame. After this scene, Hero will be extremely cautious and exceptionally quiet. The audience will only see her again when Claudio is going to marry 'Beatrice' and during that scene, Hero's face will be teary but happy and her voice will be light and airy (which reflects her relief).

My intention is for **Claudio** to undergo a significant transition from a naïve and inexperienced man to be a confident and humble character. I would like Claudio to seem deeply in love when the audience is first introduced to the character ('In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that I ever looked on'). His voice will be quite breathless, with in a tone of adoration. When he speaks of his love for Hero, his hand and head gestures and will be still and his line of vector will mostly be to the hands or feet. He should not make eye contact with the audience showing embarrassment or shame unless if he is performing a soliloquy. Claudio is also capable of anger which is shown through body language and tone(when he thinks that Don Pedro has taken Hero for himself). When Claudio is mourning the loss of Hero, his head will droop and his face will be contorted into an expression of angst and melancholy. During this time, his evolution into a mature character is progressing and I would like the audience to see this through the way Claudio stands more confidently and appears to be entirely forgiving.

Don John should appear to be modest and pleasant when he is in the company of Don Pedro. This is a façade of a quiet voice and a soft tone(which is never raised).I hope will dramatically juxtapose with more sinister side of his nature. His face will appear relaxed and agreeable. During his 'act', Don John will mostly be in the background

as a secondary character. However, when his true nature shows, his voice will be much louder and he will enforce his power on Conrade and Borachio. His back will be straight and his head will be held up.

Leonato is a man of great status so he holds himself confidently. He treats his daughter and niece kindly but uses a strong tone especially to Hero because he expects her to obey him. Generally, his movements are slow, his back is slightly bent from old age but his wit is still quite strong. During the gulling scene, his tone is quite mocking, using his hands for emphasis, however, he will not move his body very much. He will be sitting down beside Claudio and Don Pedro in this scene. In the 'Shunning scene' his calm and pleasant demeanour will be contrasted by the savage way that he treats Hero. His use of physical violence during this scene, mostly swiping and slapping, demonstrates his loss of face before the duke and his concern with his reputation.

Dogberry serves as comic relief in 'Much Ado About Nothing'. He will use humorous facial expressions and a diverse range of/dynamic voice ranges (whispering to shouting). However, his voice tone will be consistently gruff, reflecting his character as uneducated and lacking in gentlemanly qualities. I would like the audience to view him as silly but not in annoying way

Don Pedro's, as the main authoritative figure, functions as a character who establishes marriages and is the complete contrast to Don John, whose role is to destroy relationships. He acts in a superior manner, holds himself confidently and use a slight lilt in his gait to represent open arrogance. His voice is quite loud, using a strong and regal tone. When he speaks to Leonato, especially in the opening line, he will use a charming smile and greets him with a friendly voice. This shows that his character does not exploit his title and is a fair ruler. During scenes which involve banter, Don Pedro will act if he is equal in status with Beatrice, Benedick or Claudio. My intention is to show the audience that men are not superior to women because even the most dominant figure of the play could still be deceived, and is not always right

Costume

The costumes will be similar to the time period of the Elizabethan era. The characters of Much Ado About Nothing are of the wealthy class and will be dressed elaborately and expensively. However to show the superiority of men over women, the men will dress much more flamboyantly, with vivid colours and textures (similar to a male peacock's feathers compared to a female's dull feathers). All characters will be masked, reflecting their personalities and Shakespeare's character intentions.

Beatrice is not like the typical Elizabethan woman who bends under authoritative control. With the exception of the gulling scene, it appears that Beatrice is the character that is not easily manipulated or deceived because she acts mostly of her own volition. She will wear loose-fitting bodice and an ankle length dress ankle-length dress. The dress will be simple: the fabric will have a smooth texture that utilises straight lined patterns (no

curves or lace). This is because Beatrice is not delicate but rather strong-minded and independent. Her dress will be dark and rich brown colour symbolising her the deep-rooted perception of men and her own worldly experience. Her makeup will be a simple foundation with no blush and her hair will be curled (representing wealth and complexity). Her mask will be an image of the black chess 'queen' because she has a superior intellect and is independent in the way she acts and dresses.

Hero's costume will reflect her feminine and submissive qualities. Her dress will be longer than Beatrice's with a smooth, almost satin-like texture. Her costume will be quite lacy, delicate and the fabric will have intricate swirls and curves. The dress will be tight-fitting but comfortable which will accentuate her femininity. The colour of the dress will be pale blue in contrast with her counterfoil Claudio's, which will be dark blue. I believe that, like the colour of the ocean Hero is easily swayed and is the most frequently moved chess piece on the chessboard A pale, blue ocean colour for the dress reflects the sky on a calm day and this is similar to Hero because like a submissive woman, she keeps her silence and makes her superiors happy. Hero's mask will reflect a white chess 'pawn' because she is the most manipulated and the least powerful in 'Much Ado about Nothing.'

Benedick's costume will be flamboyant with a creamy base colour This will serve as a contrast to Beatrice's dark brown dress. Whereas Beatrice's dress is simple and smooth, Benedick's costume will be patterned with a rough texture but not attention-seeking. This will consist of a beige shirt with large buttons and straight patterns (compliments Beatrice) and beige pants. This will reflect his witty nature and his preference to bachelorhood due to his 'rough' and tense history with Beatrice. His hair will reach just below his ear, which will not follow the norm of the Elizabethan fashion because I would like the male characters to reflect their masculinity. However when Benedick is wooing Beatrice he will change into a dark brown shirt (same style as his beige shirt), top button of his shirt will be unbuttoned and his hair will be noticeably gelled back because he is seeking the affections of Beatrice who he is trying to impress and with whom he is deeply in love. A black chess 'bishop' will be reflected in his mask and costume because he is not straight-minded rather witty and rational.

Claudio's costume which will reflect his masculinity and contrast Hero's pale blue costume. At the beginning of the play Claudio has been introduced as a virtuous hero. His costume will reflect this: A long-sleeved navy blue shirt with a smooth texture will convey his innocence and perhaps later on, his naivety of love His superiority over women will be portrayed through the long sleeves which is a symbol of formality and respect. The shirt will have several pearl buttons indicating wealth and his costume will be complete with black dress pants that match well with the navy shirt. His hair will reach his ears, similar to Benedick's but no gel will be applied because this creates authenticity of character. My intention is that his irrational actions(shunning of Hero) and his shallowness towards women will come a complete shock to the audience. I hope for mostly the female audience members to be quite hateful of Shakespeare Claudio and to the rest of the audience, highlight the

concept that men are not more mature or superior than female intellect which is societally portrayed. His mask will display a black chess 'knight' because he is easily swayed and very indecisive (he does not travel in a straight line).

Don Pedro is the ultimate figure of royalty and power His costume will be dark purple of royalty, consisting of three articles- a shirt, knee-length robe and trousers. His shirt will be buttoned with gold-coloured studs and the back of the shirt will display small triangular tassles. These tassles will highlight the flamboyancy of the costume and especially Pedro's wealth. His robe, which will be a darker purple than the shirt, will exhibit noticeable gold patterns near the bottom Through this the audience can clearly identify the Prince as important. His mask will be the black chess 'king' because he is the main authoritative figure in the play.

Reflection Statement

Director's Notes was my initial choice of representation because I have no talent in art or computer programming. I am glad to say that writing the Director's notes served as a vital and valuable learning process in understanding and applying the word 'insight' to my work. My teacher continuously emphasised the need to show 'insight' in my work and that it is not just the summary of the plays themes or an overview of the plot. I have attempted to show insight using extensive written and visual techniques in my Director's Notes so that the issues overshadowing the play become comprehensible and relevant to modern society.

I thought that it would be interesting to use the symbolism of the chessboard pattern in my set design. I consider 'Much Ado About Nothing' as a very complex play because involves the manipulation of the character's minds and plot of the play (Hero has been cruelly manipulated because she has no choice but to be subjugated under the rule of men. The plot has been manipulated through the gulling scenes. It may be unlikely that Beatrice or Benedick will admit their feelings to each other if Hero, Claudio or Leonato had not intervened). The chess game is a universally recognisable symbols so I presumed that the audience will be able to infer that the play involves deception and the notion of 'noting' or eavesdropping. I was quite excited that I could use an element of chess symbolism in the costume design as well. The ball masks of each character represented their place in society. The use of chess pieces such as a 'pawn' mask for Hero and Beatrice's 'queen' mask (because she was 'strong' minded and independent) clearly exhibited where Shakespeare's characters stood in Elizabethan society.

I thought that it was quite important for the character's costumes to be in context with the Shakespearean dialogue. I believe that it would make the play seem much more authentic because the character and plot can be taken much more seriously. The experimentation process for the characters' costumes was quite interesting because I was able to explore each character's personalities, actions and intellect so that I can apply it to

their costume. I was especially happy about my choice of Beatrice's costume because she is a unique character to portray and my ideal female role model. Shakespeare's play is about challenging women's place in society in regards to their intellectual superiority. I thought that a character such as Beatrice should still be quite feminine in terms of her costume and hair because she is Shakespeare's choice to oppose Elizabethan deep-rooted views of women. The audience would not take Beatrice seriously and understand this concept if she cross-dressed and showed no feminine elements.

I wanted to come to an understanding on Shakespeare's intention of his character's portrayal during the play. I focused on creating juxtaposition in the costume and character performance, which I particularly enjoyed, because once I had pinpointed a relevant costume design or voice tone for a specific character, it was easy for me to write for their counterfoil or parallel character. For example, I determined that Beatrice's costume would be loose-fitting, with no hint of lace or patterns and a deep brown colour as her main material to portray her 'masculinity' and her deep understanding of men. Therefore her parallel character, Hero's costume will be the opposite of Beatrice.

Kenneth Branagh's movie 'Much Ado About Nothing 1993' and my visit to Belvoir Street Theatre proved to be inspirational to my creation of my visionary set. I was surprised at the extensive use of garden hedges and mazes in Branagh's movie, which effectively aided the gulling scenes of both Beatrice and Benedick. Also, I noted the fact that the Belvoir Street Theatre production of Shakespeare's 'As you like it' had a trapdoor which revealed a water pond. I also liked their use of curtains. I decided to incorporate these features into my set design, using the curtains as a device to change from an inside setting to an outside garden setting. The trapdoor in the middle of the stage would open up to reveal a water feature.

In character performance, I approached this by questioning myself about what the character's emotion would be in a specific scene. For instance, Claudio, during the gulling scene will obviously be feeling quite angry and repulsed. I used this small analysis and transferred it to expressions in which modern people may use if they were in this situation. In this case, Claudio could be shaking with anger, teeth gritted and neck tense. I also would like the cast's performance of their character to elicit some reaction to the audience. Once again using Claudio as an example, I would like mostly the female audience to be quite annoyed with him, and to do this, the cast of Claudio needs to portray him as shallow and naïve. This may be shown through his use of continuously changing facial expression (crying to happy).

In overall, my writing process was quite tedious but I felt that it was beneficial to my understanding of the word 'insight' as well as Shakespeare's 'Much Ado About Nothing'. I believed that the hardest feat in the task was organising the content which I would put in the director's Notes. It was difficult deciding how much I would write for each character's

The reflection clearly justifies choices made in costume and props

performance or costume and what things I would include (For Benedick, he utilises many facial expressions for different scenes. I had to decide what kind of information I would provide, whether it was in the general sense or detailed for a specific scene. I ended up by choosing the most significant scenes for the character). However, I believe that the complexity of this representation was worth it because once I had finished it, the satisfaction was overwhelming.

Grade Commentary

Alex has demonstrated a thorough understanding of the characters and themes evidenced in various aspects of performance, such as costume, body language and tone of voice. The response perceptively interprets the context and composes a sustained representation of the director's notes. This response would have benefitted from a more explicit discussion of purpose and audience in the reflection. Alex's work sample demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at a grade B standard.