

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY - MINNEAPOLIS

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Much Ado About Nothing

Story by
William Shakespeare

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Much Ado About Nothing

Cast: Seattle Children's Theatre performed the play with 14 actors.

There are twenty-three speaking parts, four female and nineteen male. Even with doubling, it takes about a dozen actors minimum to do this version.

Hero, daughter of Leonato
Beatrice, niece to Leonato
Margaret, a gentlewoman attending on Hero
Ursula, a gentlewoman attending on Hero

Don Pedro, prince of Arragon
Don John, his bastard brother
Claudio, a young lord of Florence, marries Hero
Benedick, a young lord of Padua, marries Beatrice
Leonato, governor of Messina
Antonio, Leonato's brother
Balthasar, attendant on Don Pedro
Conrade, follower of Don John
Borachio, follower of Don John
Friar Francis
Dogberry, a constable
Verges, a headborough
Sexton
Boy

Lord
Messenger
Watchman
First Watchman
Second Watchman

Setting: Messina. The conventional scene divisions and locations have been put in for reference, but this play actually comes close to observing the unity of place; almost all of it happens on Leonato's estate, and the action should be continuous.

ACT I, SCENE ONE, BEFORE LEONATO'S HOUSE

Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a Messenger

LEONATO

Don Pedro of Arragon comes this night?

Messenger

He is very near.

LEONATO

I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor on young Claudio.

Messenger

He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion.

BEATRICE

I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?

Messenger

I know none of that name, lady.

HERO

My cousin means Signior Benedick.

Messenger

O, he's returned.

BEATRICE

I pray you, how many hath he killed in these wars? For indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

Messenger

He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.

LEONATO

You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her: they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE

Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

Messenger

He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.

BEATRICE

God help the noble Claudio! If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured.

Messenger

Don Pedro is approached.

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and BALTHASAR

DON PEDRO

Good Signior Leonato

LEONATO

Your grace.

DON PEDRO

This is your daughter?

LEONATO

Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK

Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

BEATRICE

I wonder that you will be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK

What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

BEATRICE

Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such food to feed it as Signior Benedick?

BENEDICK

I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and truly, I love none.

BEATRICE

A dear happiness to women: I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK

God keep your ladyship still in that mind!

DON PEDRO

Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here at the least a month.

LEONATO

To DON JOHN

Let me bid you welcome, my lord: being reconciled to the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

DON JOHN

I thank you: I am not of many words, but I thank you.

Exeunt all except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO

CLAUDIO

Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

BENEDICK

I looked on her.

CLAUDIO

I pray thee speak in sober judgment.

BENEDICK

Would you buy her, that you inquire after her?

CLAUDIO

Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK

Yea, and a case to put it into.

CLAUDIO

In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on.

BENEDICK

I can see without spectacles and I see no such matter: I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?

CLAUDIO

If Hero would be my wife.

BENEDICK

Is it come to this? Go to, in faith; if thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke, wear the print of it and sigh away Sundays.

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO

What secret hath held you here, that you followed not?

BENEDICK

He is in love. With Hero, Leonato's daughter.

CLAUDIO

That I love her, I feel.

DON PEDRO

That she is worthy, I know.

BENEDICK

That I neither feel how she should be loved nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that I will die in at the stake.

DON PEDRO

Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the face of beauty.

BENEDICK

That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but I will live a bachelor.

DON PEDRO

I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love.

BENEDICK

With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, not with love.

DON PEDRO

'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke.'

BENEDICK

The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead: and let me be vilely painted, and in great letters write 'Here you may see Benedick the married man.'

Exit

DON PEDRO

Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

CLAUDIO

O, my lord, now that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires.

DON PEDRO

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
I know we shall have revelling to-night:
I will assume thy part in some disguise
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
And take her hearing prisoner with the force
And strong encounter of my amorous tale:
Then after to her father will I break;
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In practice let us put it presently.

Exeunt

ACT I, SCENE THREE, A ROOM IN LEONATO'S HOUSE

Enter DON JOHN and CONRADE

CONRADE

My lord! Why are you sad?

DON JOHN

I cannot hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause.

CONRADE

Yea, but you must not make the full show of this. You have of
late stood out against your brother, and he hath taken you newly
into his grace.

DON JOHN

I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace. I
am trusted with a muzzle. If I had my mouth, I would bite.

CONRADE

Can you make no use of your discontent?

DON JOHN

Who comes here?

Enter BORACHIO

What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO

I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN

What is the fool that betroths himself to unquietness?

BORACHIO

Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

DON JOHN

Who? The most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO

Even he.

DON JOHN

And who, and who? which way looks he?

BORACHIO

Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

DON JOHN

How came you to this?

BORACHIO

I heard it agreed upon that the prince should woo Hero, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

DON JOHN

Come, come, let us thither. That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow: if I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way. You both will assist me?

CONRADE

To the death, my lord.

Exeunt

ACT II, SCENE ONE, A HALL IN LEONATO'S HOUSE

Enter LEONATO, ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others

LEONATO

Was not Count John here at supper?

ANTONIO

I saw him not.

BEATRICE

How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heart-burned an hour after.

LEONATO

By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

BEATRICE

Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face.

LEONATO

You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

BEATRICE

What should I do with him? He that hath no beard is less than a man: and he that is less than a man, I am not for him.

LEONATO

The revellers are entering, brother.

All put on their masks

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, MARGARET, URSULA and others, masked

DON PEDRO

Lady, will you walk about with your friend?

HERO

So you walk softly and look sweetly, I am yours for the walk.

Drawing her aside

BALTHASAR

Well, I would you did like me.

MARGARET

So would not I, for your own sake; for I have many ill qualities.

BALTHASAR

Which is one?

MARGARET

I say my prayers aloud.

BALTHASAR

I love you the better: the hearers may cry, Amen.

MARGARET

God match me with a good dancer!

BALTHASAR

Amen.

MARGARET

And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done!

BALTHASAR

No more words.

BEATRICE

Will you not tell me who told you so?

BENEDICK

No, you shall pardon me.

BEATRICE

That I was disdainful, and that I had my wit out of a book--well this was Signior Benedick that said so.

BENEDICK

What's he?

BEATRICE

I am sure you know him well enough.

BENEDICK

Not I, believe me.

BEATRICE

Why, he is the prince's jester: a very dull fool; his gift is in devising impossible slanders: he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him. I am sure he is in the fleet: I would he had boarded me.

BENEDICK

When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say.

*Dance. Then exeunt all except DON JOHN, BORACHIO, and
CLAUDIO*

DON JOHN

I'll say my brother is amorous on Hero and hath withdrawn her father to break with him about it.

BORACHIO

That is Claudio: I know him by his bearing.

DON JOHN

Are not you Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO

You know me well; I am he.

DON JOHN

Signior, you are very near my brother in his love: he is enamored on Hero; I pray you, dissuade him from her: she is no equal for his birth.

CLAUDIO

How know you he loves her?

DON JOHN

I heard him swear his affection.

BORACHIO

So did I too; and he swore he would marry her tonight.

DON JOHN

Come, let us to the banquet.

Exeunt DON JOHN and BORACHIO

CLAUDIO

Thus answer I in the name of Benedick,
But hear these ill news with the ears of Claudio. 'Tis certain
so; the prince woos for himself. Farewell, therefore, Hero!

Re-enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK

Count Claudio?

CLAUDIO

Yea, the same.

BENEDICK

The prince hath got your Hero.

CLAUDIO

I wish him joy of her.

BENEDICK

Why, that's spoken like a drover: so they sell bullocks. But did you think the prince would serve you thus?

CLAUDIO

I pray you, leave me.

Exit

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO

Now, signior, where's the count? Did you see him?

BENEDICK

I found him here as melancholy as a rabbit in a warren: I told him, and I think I told him true, that your grace had got the good will of this young lady; but you, he takes it, have stolen his birds' nest.

DON PEDRO

I will but teach them to sing, and restore them to the owner. The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you: the gentleman that danced with her told her she is much wronged by you.

BENEDICK

O, she misused me past the endurance of a block! She told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was the prince's jester. I would not marry her, though she were endowed with --

DON PEDRO

Look, here she comes.

Enter CLAUDIO, BEATRICE, HERO, and LEONATO

BENEDICK

Will your grace command me any service to the world's end? I will fetch you a toothpick now from the furthest inch of Asia. You have no employment for me?

DON PEDRO

None, but to desire your good company.

BENEDICK

O God, sir, here's a dish I love not: I cannot endure my Lady Tongue.

Exit

DON PEDRO

Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.

BEATRICE

I have brought Count Claudio, whom you sent me to seek.

DON PEDRO

Why, how now, count! Wherefore are you sad?

CLAUDIO

Not sad, my lord.

DON PEDRO

How then? Sick?

CLAUDIO

Neither, my lord.

BEATRICE

The count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil, count, civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

DON PEDRO

Claudio, I have wooed in thy name, and fair Hero is won: I have broke with her father, and his good will obtained: name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

LEONATO

Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes.

BEATRICE

Speak, count, 'tis your cue.

CLAUDIO

Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. Lady, as you are mine,
I am yours:

BEATRICE

Speak, cousin; or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss,
and let not him speak neither.

DON PEDRO

In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

BEATRICE

Yea, my lord; I thank it, poor fool; it keeps on the windy side
of care. My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart.

CLAUDIO

And so she doth, cousin.

BEATRICE

Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes every one to the world but I;
I may sit in a corner and cry heigh-ho for a husband!

DON PEDRO

Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

BEATRICE

I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your
grace ne'er a brother like you? Your father got excellent
husbands, if a maid could come by them.

DON PEDRO

Will you have me, lady?

BEATRICE

No, my lord, unless I might have another for working days: your
grace is too costly to wear every day. But, I beseech your
grace, pardon me: I was born to speak all mirth and no matter.

DON PEDRO

Out of question, you were born in a merry hour.

BEATRICE

No, sure, my lord, my mother cried; but then there was a star
danced, and under that was I born. Cousins, God give you joy!

Exit

DON PEDRO

By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

LEONATO

She is never sad but when she sleeps, for I have heard my daughter say, she hath often dreamed of unhappiness and waked herself with laughing.

DON PEDRO

She were an excellent wife for Benedict.

LEONATO

O Lord, my lord, if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.

DON PEDRO

County Claudio, when mean you to go to church?

CLAUDIO

Tomorrow, my lord.

LEONATO

Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence just seven-night.

DON PEDRO

I warrant thee, Claudio, the time shall not go dully by us. I will in the interim undertake to bring Signior Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection the one with the other, if you three will but minister such assistance as I shall give you direction.

LEONATO

My lord, I am for you.

CLAUDIO

And I, my lord.

DON PEDRO

And you too, gentle Hero?

HERO

I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good husband.

DON PEDRO

I will teach you how to humour your cousin, that she shall fall in love with Benedick; and I, with your two helps, will so practice on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer: his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods.

Exeunt

ACT II, SCENE TWO, LEONATO'S HOUSE

Enter DON JOHN and BORACHIO

DON JOHN

It is so; the Count Claudio shall marry the daughter of Leonato.

BORACHIO

Yea, my lord; but I can cross it.

DON JOHN

Show me how.

BORACHIO

I think I told your lordship, how much I am in the favour of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero.

DON JOHN

I remember.

BORACHIO

I can, at any unseasonable instant of the night, appoint her to look out at her lady's chamber window.

DON JOHN

What life is in that, to be the death of this marriage?

BORACHIO

Draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone. Tell them that you know that Hero loves me. They will see me at her chamber-window, hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding.

DON JOHN

Be cunning in working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.

Exeunt

ACT II, SCENE THREE, LEONATO'S ORCHARD

Enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK

Claudio was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier; and now his words are a very fantastical banquet. May I be so converted? I think not: till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what colour it please God. Ha! The prince and Monsieur Love! I will hide me in the arbor.

Withdraws

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO

DON PEDRO

Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO

I did never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATO

No, nor I neither; but most wonderful that she should so dote on Signior Benedick.

BENEDICK

Is it possible?

DON PEDRO

You amaze me: I would have I thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATO

I would have sworn it had, my lord; especially against Benedick.

CLAUDIO

He hath taken the infection: hold it up.

DON PEDRO

Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATO

No; and swears she never will: that's her torment.

CLAUDIO

'Tis true, indeed; so your daughter says: 'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'

LEONATO

'I measure him,' says she, 'by my own spirit; for I should flout him, if he writ to me; yea, though I love him, I should.'

CLAUDIO

Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses; 'O sweet Benedick! God give me patience!'

LEONATO

She doth indeed; my daughter says so: my daughter is sometime afeared she will do a desperate outrage to herself: it is very true.

DON PEDRO

It were good that Benedick knew of it.

CLAUDIO

He would make but a sport of it and torment the poor lady worse.

DON PEDRO

She's an excellent sweet lady; and, out of all suspicion, she is virtuous.

CLAUDIO

And she is exceeding wise.

DON PEDRO

In every thing but in loving Benedick.

LEONATO

I am sorry for her, being her uncle and her guardian.

DON PEDRO

I would she had bestowed this dotage on me: 'tis very possible he'll scorn her love; for the man, as you know all, hath a contemptible spirit.

CLAUDIO

He is a very proper man.

DON PEDRO

Well I am sorry for your niece. I love Benedick well; and I could wish he would modestly examine himself, to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady.

LEONATO

My lord, dinner is ready.

CLAUDIO

If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

DON PEDRO

Let there be the same net spread for her; and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry. Let us send her to call him in to dinner.

Exeunt DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO

BENEDICK

[Coming forward] This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. Love me! Why, it must be requited. I did never think to marry: I must not seem proud: happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair and virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. The world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day! she's a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her.

Enter BEATRICE

BEATRICE

Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.

BENEDICK

Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEATRICE

If it had been painful, I would not have come: fare you well.

Exit

BENEDICK

Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner;' there's a double meaning in that. If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain.

Exit

ACT III, SCENE ONE, LEONATO'S GARDEN

Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA, BEATRICE behind

HERO

No, truly, Ursula, she is too disdainful. I know her spirits are as coy and wild as haggards of the rock.

URSULA

But are you sure that Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

HERO

So says the prince and my new-trothed lord.

URSULA

And did they bid you tell her of it, madam?

HERO

They did entreat me to acquaint her of it;
But I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick,
To never to let Beatrice know of it.

URSULA

Why did you so?

HERO

Nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice;
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on, and her wit
Values itself so highly that to her
All matter else seems weak: she cannot love.

URSULA

Sure, I think so;
And therefore certainly it were not good
She knew his love, lest she make sport at it.

HERO

Why, you speak truth. I never yet saw man,
How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,
But she would spell him backward: if fair-faced,
She would swear the gentleman should be her sister;
If speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds;
If silent, why, a block moved with none.
So turns she every man the wrong side out.

URSULA

Sure, sure, such carping is not commendable.

HERO

But who dare tell her so? If I should speak,
She would mock me into air;
Therefore let Benedick, like covered fire,
Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly:

URSULA

Yet tell her of it: hear what she will say.

HERO

No; rather I will go to Benedick
And counsel him to fight against his passion.

URSULA

O, do not do your cousin such a wrong.
She cannot be so much without true judgment--as to refuse
So rare a gentleman as Signior Benedick.

HERO

He is the only man of Italy.
Always excepted my dear Claudio.

URSULA

When are you married, madam?

HERO

Why, every day, to-morrow. Come, go in:
I'll show thee some attires, and have thy counsel
Which is the best to furnish me to-morrow.

URSULA

I warrant you: we have caught her, madam.

Exeunt HERO and URSULA

BEATRICE

[Coming forward]
What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell! And maiden pride, adieu!
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand:
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band;
For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.

Exit

ACT III, SCENE TWO, LEONATO'S HOUSE

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and LEONATO

DON PEDRO

I do but stay till your marriage be consummate, and then go I
toward Arragon.

CLAUDIO

I'll bring you thither, my lord.

DON PEDRO

Nay, that would be as great a soil in the new gloss of your
marriage as to show a child his new coat and forbid him to wear
it. I will only be bold with Benedick for his company; he hath a
heart as sound as a bell.

BENEDICK

Gallants, I am not as I have been.

LEONATO

So say I; methinks you are sadder.