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# Cal Shakes it Up in 12th Night

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Dana Green (as Olivia) and Alex Morf (as Viola/Sebastian) in Cal Shakes production of Twelfth Night
Photo by Kevin Berne

Most of Shakespeare's comedies include a healthy dose of mistaken identity, cross-dressing women, and men in drag to befuddle the cast and amuse the audience. Cal Shakes upcoming production of Twelfth Night will include further gender bending with the casting of the roles. "This play gives me the permission to address gender-both in the story and in the casting-and invites ambiguity around gender," states Director Mark Rucker. "I auditioned both genders for every part, and then I cast the actor who was the most right for the role," he adds. Sharon Lockwood, a Cal Shakes veteran, will play the role of the dour male servant Malvolio in Twelfth Night. "I was a little taken back when I was called for the part of Malvolio," confesses Lockwood. "I was flattered, but then I thought, what am I doing?" she adds with a laugh. Playing the part of a man is not new to Lockwood who has portrayed several male characters in previous performances including a stint as the stocky and blustery Teddy Roosevelt for one play. Lockwood is able to take her already husky voice down a couple of notches and seems comfortable sporting facial hair in the evenings. "There is a severity and physicality to male roles, and I guess that I have gotten better at it," she notes. Director Rucker has made another less traditional casting choice for the parts of leading character Viola and her twin brother Sebastian. Actor Alex Morf, a recent graduate of the American Conservatory Theater MFA program, will play both roles. Because Viola spends much of the play disguised as a male page named Cesario, the choice of a male actor might seem quite logical. However, when the scene moves to Viola, dressed as Cesario, falling in love with the Duke Orsinio, Morf will find himself as a man playing a woman masquerading as man in love with a man-an acting challenge to say the least. The coastal kingdom Illyria, the setting for Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, has been brought forward several hundred years in Rucker's version for Cal Shakes. "It's like Studio 54 in the late 70's," explains Lockwood. "There are disco balls and the costumes are fun and funny-one character spends much of the play on roller skates." "After rehearsing the part of Malvolio, I'm having a blast," says Lockwood. "I'm really excited for the play." Although Lockwood finds performing outside at the Bruns Amphitheater, the home of Cal Shakes in Orinda, presents challenges, she enjoys working in the beautiful surroundings. "It's outdoors-that's always harder. But, what makes it hard is what makes it wonderful." Twelfth Night runs September 10th through October 5th. The grounds of the Bruns Amphitheater open two hours prior to show time for onsite picnicking. For more details go to www.calshakes.org.

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