

MOVIE REVIEW

Film Clips

# Acclaimed Plummer Returns to Rheem

By Derek Zemrak



Once again Lamorinda residents will have the opportunity to hear Litz Plummer perform live at the Rheem Theatre at 7 p.m. on Saturday, June 18.

Plummer appeared at the Rheem in February to a sold-out audience, as she astonished attendees singing opera's greatest arias. This time, she will be performing the most-loved songs in the history of Broadway and the movies.

Plummer is a spinto soprano, a classification of voice that combines the melodic ease of a lyric soprano with some of the depth of tone and power of a dramatic soprano. This unique mix of timbres allows her to perform an eclectic mix of repertoires, even allowing her to sing arias from traditionally mezzo soprano roles.

At the tender age of three, Plummer announced to her parents that she would be an opera singer, presumably after watching a Bugs Bunny cartoon. The idea stayed with her through her formative years, and she finally began her formal training at age 13. At the University of Georgia, she studied with Dr. David Stoffel, a baritone, earning a bach-

elor's degree in vocal performance. After graduating, she moved to North Carolina and worked as the house singer at two Raleigh-area Macaroni Grills, eventually becoming involved with the Durham Savoyards (a Gilbert and Sullivan troupe) and the Long Leaf Opera, before moving to San Francisco to pursue the dream of a performing career.

Plummer has performed in such varied venues as the Legion of Honor, the de Young and Asian Art Museums, Martuni's, The Punchline, Broadway Studios, Copia, the Bohemian Grove, the Marin Art and Garden Center and the Eagle Tavern.

Plummer also appeared on the hit television series, "America's Got Talent."

The Rheem Theatre is proud to bring this caliber of live entertainment to Lamorinda. Plummer's performance of "Ave Maria" alone is worth the price of admission, which is \$20. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.lamorindatheatres.com](http://www.lamorindatheatres.com) or at the Rheem Theatre Box-Office. Don't miss the amazing voice of Litz Plummer on June 18.

# 'Much Ado' is a Fast-paced Delight

By Lou Fancher



James Carpenter as Beatrice in California Shakespeare Theater's production of "Much Ado About Nothing," directed by Jackson Gay. Photo Alessandra Mello

Love and shame haven't changed in over 400 years.

Words of devotion or degradation written by William Shakespeare in approximately 1598 and hurried onto the stage in Cal Shakes' fast-paced season opener, "Much Ado About Nothing," cut to the "bones" as powerfully as when they were originally crafted.

Adapted by Kenneth Lin and Jackson Gay, the re-imagined 100-minute play has a stellar cast hurling gossip, innuendos and loving declarations at heart-racing speeds in the outdoor theater company's 25th season at Orinda's Bruns Amphitheater. If an opening scene fails to do more than alert audiences to Cal Shake's progressive approach to classic theater or folds into flatness or confusion as it introduces overused gender-bending role play, the rest of the action is a jolly jig.

Lin, widely known as a writer-producer of the Emmy-award winning "House of Cards," and Gay, who directs the production, begin Shakespeare's comedic play about gender, class and love with an add-on. Behind the scenes at a wedding, a catering crew tells exaggerated — and not so exaggerated — versions of wedding guests' behavior. While it's well-written by Lin and often clever in simple ways — "Messina's," written on the side of the catering truck is an easy leap to Messina, the city in which Shakespeare set "Much Ado" — the flip between this 21st century prologue and the actual play is cloudy. In this version, actors play multiple roles; male actors play female characters and vice versa: some people may find the additional mélange of old and new eras overly confusing.

At the same time, Lin has trimmed significant portions of the play. The resulting briskness—and the casts' incisive per-

formances—eventually erase any mix-ups and keep the basic plot afloat with dramatic, accelerated flair.

The classic "Much Ado" is a romantic comedy that delves occasionally into issues of class and society but remains primarily centered on Beatrice, a young woman with a wicked wit, and Benedick, an aristocratic soldier. Both claim to have little interest in marriage or each other, but everyone around them knows attraction sizzles between them. A second romance between the gentle Hero and brave but impetuous Claudio takes more stage time but serves primarily to underscore the bitter or steamy battles played out across social classes and between lovers.

They've all been brought together by the triumphal return of Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon. Don Pedro has defeated his brother, Don John, in a recent battle. Gathered at the home of Leonato, the father of Hero and uncle of Beatrice, resentment lurks in every corner. While the upper class folks carve each other into mince-meat, the commoners revel or trip over the leftovers—most notably, Dogberry, the constable of Messina whose verbal foibles have the nobility labeling him "an ass." Through a matrix of lies, eavesdropping and manipulations, public shaming nearly destroys the prospect of love and the possibility peace between family members. Of course, in this Shakespeare play famous for having no one die, all is well by the end and a double wedding promises to be celebratory.

James Carpenter (Beatrice) is most moving, infusing his portrayal of femininity with tremendous grace, nobility and a physicality that is never cliché or self-mocking. Stacy Ross (Benedick) inhabits the oily/prickly dynamic of a

man separated from his own self so completely that it takes conscious effort to remember this is a woman playing a man — and even more effort to care, when the acting is this good. In a performance Sunday, June 5, Lance Gardner (Ursula, Don Pedro) was infinitely watchable in high-contrasting roles. Anthony Fusco (Dogberry, Leonato) proved himself adept at all levels; charming as Messina's bumbling chief of police and hateful as a disdainful father declaring ownership of his daughter. No wonder he is a staple at Cal Shakes, A.C.T, Berkeley Rep and other Bay Area theater companies.

Eric Flatmo's set that relied largely on mobile props was appealing, if surprisingly underused. Costumes by Karina Chavarin were most effective in Carpenter's bold green jacket that mimicked a miniskirt and the first scene's quick-change hats and jackets used to establish identity. "Much Ado" runs through June 19.

For the complete season and more information, visit <http://www.calshakes.org/>.



Stacy Ross as Benedick in California Shakespeare Theater's production of MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, directed by Jackson Gay. Photo Alessandra Mello

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## Vacation Bible School

Kids from 1-6 grade will be submerged in a journey finding the truth about God below the surface. Vacation Bible School is an exciting place for kids to come make new friends, have fun, and learn about the Bible. The Willow Spring Church Team has planned fun games, crafts, videos, songs, and healthy snacks!

**Date: July 18th to July 22nd.**

**Check in:** 1:30 pm program starts 2:00 pm and concludes at 5:45 pm.

**Price:** \$50 per participant. Max fee per family (2 or more participants): \$100. Payment available on website.

Online Registration at [WillowSpringChurch.com](http://WillowSpringChurch.com)  
Willow Spring Church, 1689 School St., Moraga

## Service Clubs Announcements



We meet Friday mornings at 7:00 am at **The Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa**, 3666 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette. For more info, please email us at [lamorindasunrise@gmail.com](mailto:lamorindasunrise@gmail.com)

**June 17**  
**John Bateson, The Last Great Battle**

**June 24**  
The curtain comes down on the Ron Melvin show!

**Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary will be DARK on Friday, July 1. Happy Fourth of July. Enjoy the extra-long weekend!**

## Lafayette Rotary Club

**Step in on a Thursday and join us for our lunch meeting.** Thursday at noon Oakwood Athletic Club, 4000 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette.

**June 16:**  
**Steve Harwood,**  
Lamorinda Arts Council

**June 23:**  
**Richard Wexler, J.D.,**  
Intelligent Aging

**ROCK THE PLAZA: Fri. June 17, Ticket To Ride**  
[www.rotarylafayette.org](http://www.rotarylafayette.org)  
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**Contact us:**

Letters to the editor (max 350 words): [letters@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:letters@lamorindaweekly.com)  
Delivery issues: [homedelivery@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:homedelivery@lamorindaweekly.com)  
Event listings: [calendar@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:calendar@lamorindaweekly.com)  
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Sport events/stories/pictures: [sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Publishers/Owners:** Andy and Wendy Schreck; [andy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:andy@lamorindaweekly.com), [wendy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:wendy@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Editor:** Peggy Spear; [peggy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:peggy@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Copy Editor:** Nick Marnell; [nick@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:nick@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Sports Editor:** [sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Advertising:** 925-377-0977, Wendy Schreck; [wendy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:wendy@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Staff Writers:** Sophie Braccini; [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

Cathy Dausman; [cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com)

Nick Marnell; [nick@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:nick@lamorindaweekly.com)

Sora O'Doherty; [Sora@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:Sora@lamorindaweekly.com)

Victor Ryerson; [victor@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:victor@lamorindaweekly.com)

Cathy Tyson; [cathy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy@lamorindaweekly.com)

Gigging Deep: Cynthia Brian; [cynthia@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cynthia@lamorindaweekly.com)

Food: Susie Iventosch; [suziventosch@gmail.com](mailto:suziventosch@gmail.com)

**Contributing Writers:** Conrad Bassett, Moya Stone, Jennifer Wake, Lou Fancher, Chris Lavin, Amanda Kuehn Carroll, Diane Claytor, Uma Unni, Karl Buscheck, Ryan McKinley, Zoe Portnoff, Clare Varellas, Adam Blake, Daniel Smith, Fran Miller, Jade Shojaee, Emily Dugdale, Dean Boerner, Barry Hunau (cartoonist), Derek Zemrak

**Calendar Editor:** Jaya Griggs; [calendar@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:calendar@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Photos:** Tod Fierner, Ohlen Alexander, Gint Fedaras

**Layout/Graphics:** Andy Schreck. Printed in CA.

Mail address: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O. Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570-6133  
Phone: 925-377-0977; Fax: 1-800-690-8136  
email: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com) website: [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com)