

# A confusing comedy at Maynardville

By [John Cooper](#) 24 Jan 2012

Some serious Googling the day before and then a quick read of the programme notes just before "curtain-up" (not that there is a curtain, but you know what I mean) were essential prerequisites for my being able to follow the riotous twists and turns of William Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors, this summer season's offering at the Maynardville open-air theatre.

## Kung Fu Kablam!



Now it seems very reasonable to assume that Shakespeare never saw a panda, nor even had heard of one. But Comedy of Errors at Maynardville has one (with Oscar Sanders inside the suit) on and off the stage throughout the play. No matter! One endearing, and enduring, thing about the Bard's plays is their timeless quality and the ability of successive directors to place them in a modern (or any) setting. Umabatha (Macbeth) with two fearsome Zulu impis facing off at Dunsinane way back in 1974 at Maynardville is a case in point and, in the film genre, what about Richard III bringing the pre-WWII British fascist Sir Oswald Mosley to mind, all in sinister black in the 1995 movie? Perfect!

But to the current play, directed by Matthew Wild (new to Shakespeare at Maynardville) with set and costume design by Angela Nemov. A riot of colours, leaps, cries, grunts, much scampering about and a huge diversity of accents signal the kung fu approach, modelled (as the programme helpfully says) on those Chinese martial arts movies of the 1980s.

## Doubly confusing

The play starts off with a monologue. Egeon (Stephen Jennings) is pretty miserable (understandably) as he is about to be executed, apparently just for turning up in the wrong place. I found this hard to follow with no very clear diction, but did like the acted-out shipwreck with big waves depicted by waving fabric strips.

The play then gets going properly with two sets of twins and their parents separated in the shipwreck and neither knowing of the other's continued existence (dunno why their parents didn't tell them they had twin brothers, but that's Shakespeare for you) meeting up in the same city (Ephesus). The two sets of masters and servants have the same name, which is doubly confusing (pun intended). Now they have never met, but somehow when they come on stage they have chosen to wear near-identical clothes! Never mind, a Shakespearean liberty yet again.

## Who's who?



The two servants (both called Dromio) are well acted by Rob van Vuuren and James Cairn; lots of pranks and pratfalls in strange vaguely Italian accents. They get hit on the head a lot by their masters (the two Antipholuses, Nicholas Pauling and Andrew Laubscher - also well acted) and you have to concentrate to work out which Antipholus is whacking which Dromio.

Then we get some crumpet. Adriana (Sonia Esgueira), suitably over the top in what used to be called hot pants, is missing out on conjugal nookie from her Antipholus, so latches on to the other (wrong) one with enthusiasm (who has never met her and is not married anyway). Needless to say he is somewhat confused (but not wholly unwilling), as is the audience by this stage. Hubbie Antipholus then comes home late from dallying with Jenny Stead as a courtesan (more short shorts), to find himself locked out, and so it goes on.

### **Confusions are cleared up**



Lots more things happen, lots more falling about and so on. The unmarried Antipholus falls for Adriana's more demure sister, Luciana (Frances Marek) who thinks he is actually her brother-in-law, so more confusion. In the end it, it all gets sorted out: the merchant doesn't get the chop, the Abbess (Adrienne Pearce) turns out to be his long-lost wife and they the parents of the Antipholus twins. That just leaves a few confusions to clear up, some items to return to rightful owners, two Dromio brothers to nervously say hello each other, and a shambling panda that at last gets to shake his booty. The audience goes home a little puzzled as to why the lord of the city, Solinus, is acted by a woman (Chi Mhende). She also acts out Nell, Adrian's servant, who fancies getting it on with Dromio (doesn't matter which one). Look out for [callipygous](#) Nell, she's a hoot! Oh yes, there's a DJ (Nieke Lombard) who alternately spins the music and reads a boole (perhaps the play to work out what the hell is going on?) from an upstairs window.

*The Comedy of Errors runs at Cape Town's Maynardville open-air theatre between 10 January and 18 February, 2012. Tickets are priced at R100, R130, and R150. Book at Computicket or Artscape Dial-a-Seat on +27 (0)21 421 7695.*