

## Get ready for love: about *like me*

I've pretty much been a fan Shakespeare's *As You Like It* since I first saw it thirteen years ago – its freewheeling looseness and loopiness, the character of Rosalind (one of the all-time greats), its inherent capacity for chaos (the irresistible temptation for productions to include sheep rather proves the point). Above all, it features one of the great female friendships in the Comedies: the jostling, joking, playful, heartfelt, knife-edge relationship of Rosalind & Celia – very much on par with their cousins Beatrice & Hero, Hermia & Helena, Viola, the glorious women of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

The older I've got however, the more I've started to wonder if the heart of the play isn't in Celia instead. True, Rosalind runs away with *As You Like It* in much the same way Hamlet and Falstaff run away with their plays, but it is Celia's idea to escape to the forest in the first place, her relationship with Rosalind which kicks the play into gear, yet she all-but-disappears from the play's action halfway through, gets a bit of a raw deal in the end. (I also don't buy the idea that Orlando has no idea what's going on. Not one bit. He knows exactly which way is up, but he plays along because he wants to see where this will go. Of course Shakespeare knew this too – we wouldn't have the play otherwise.)

Fast-forward to November 2021: it struck me that *As You Like It* was perhaps the perfect pandemic play – a group of characters retreat from the city to the country to wait out whatever ills society has before (potentially) returning. For some years now I've wanted to write this play but haven't quite pulled all the disparate parts together. The Celia-Rosalind relationship has always been the heart of the story, but in pivoting the story through Celia's eyes, I wanted to try and reclaim some of her role in the original. Viewed as a Shakespearean comedy for the present day, *like me* isn't about Shakespeare's play so much as how the story and characters might behave today, what my heart in that story is.

It feels appropriate that this play was written in days stolen during Omicron isolations throughout the booster-summer. Rewinding us to a time a year previous, *like me* asks how do we love in times of great uncertainty; what happens when the only person you have eyes for doesn't quite see you in the same way; and can we settle for second-best if second-best is not an option?

I'm grateful to Someone New Theatre Company for taking a chance on this play about big hearts and wide open spaces, and giving it a brave new audio home – thank you to Ryan O'Connor, Joanna Lusty, Anna Faye, Colleen Lawrence, Andy Steuart. Thank you also to: Barbara Chung, Janelle Ewert, Remy Prichard, Laura R, Verity Wells, Alana Wesley, Max Wilkie, Cassandra-Elli Yiannacou; Hilary Bell, Elyse Horan. I still hold the hope of driving down the highway with these two mad dorks for company one day soon.

GS

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