



[Twelve Nights or WTF?](#) at [Three Minute Theatre](#)

By Manchester Shakespeare Company

Reviewed by [Paul Thompson](#) December 2014

Two characters are leafing through DVDs, deciding which movie to watch. “Ten Things I Hate About You,” suggests one of them.

“Nah”, dismisses the other. “It's based on Shakespeare. It's bound to be shit.”

And if the prolific, nodding-and-winking in-jokes of the night are plays by The Bard, that zinger is King Lear. It's a taste of the sort of snappy and uncomplicated gag on offer for anyone who, like me, has no idea what to expect from Twelve Nights (or WTF) – by Three Minute Theatre's in-house team Manchester Shakespeare Company. They've given birth to a knockabout latter-day spin on Twelfth Night (or What You Will) by Stratford-Upon-Avon's most famous offspring. A farcical, panto-flavoured spoof reimagines the tale in FUK – the former United Kingdom – where UKIP are all-powerful, and zero immigration prevails.

Interesting, yes? Has the NHS fallen to its knees? Is the skills gap at an all-time high? Has employment creation suffered at all? Don't expect to find out any of that. The theme is the meat and two veg of the crisis: Lazy-arsed Brits don't do menial work, rendering the nation's hotel rooms undusted and their toilets unclean. Also: I think there was a mention about not being able to get a decent curry.

But who cares about the issues with such a dollop of brandy-butter fun before the festive audience of its muse? So let's focus on the story. Okay. Well, if you know Twelfth Night: it's much like that with the immigrant boy-girl twins **Viola** (***Sophie Toland***) and **Sebastian** (***Daniel Brotherton***)

), separated by an accident and both thinking the other is dead. But here, it's Sebastian that takes centre stage and with a hilarious lack of explanation, disguises himself via the gift of

gender swap.

Sebastian lands a job skivvying for brassy, swish-hotel boss **Horsina Pilton** (***Sophie Anne Ellicott***).

Sebastian's in love with Horsina who in turn lusts after an unsettlingly smarmy guest inspired by Hugh Grant called

Oliver De Tabloids

(

Charlie Colquhoun

). Oliver though, believing Sebastian to be a woman, falls for him. Also bunking down in Oliver's penthouse suite are two hard-drinking harpies: Oliver's aunt

Tia Maria

(

Louise Wilson

) and

Andrea Palemuscht

(also

Toland

), an American import slash would-be romantic match for Oliver.

Tia struggles with her mission to make this pairing happen, so reverts to scheming against obnoxious and sub-John-Inman gay stereotype **Malcom** (***Tony Charnock***) – Oliver's PA. A fake missive causes Malcolm to think Oliver is in love with him – and this gives rise to some really nice self-reference: Tia explains to Andrea they can talk behind the screen without Malcolm hearing because it's a “theatrical convention” – and prays to the God Of Comedy that Malcolm reads the letter out loud.

There's also something else about Viola having a lesbian affair with a fugitive former employee

of Horsina's gaff, **Antonia** (also **Wilson**). And, eventually, the twins – who share not one similar physical attribute bar the ownership of long hair – will be mistaken for each other, right? You get the idea. In the grand tradition of the Shakespearian comedy, it's unhinged and sub-plotty – and you'll be scratching your head during the interval, no doubt. But it's all resolved nicely in a second act that flash-fries – less prone than the slow-burning first instalment to the odd lull and flat joke. All is professional on the directorial and thespian front – especially Brotherton's shy and deadpan Sebastian as a nice foil to Ellicott's gobby and garish Horsina.

We can sweep under the rug a couple of technical gremlins: a speaker on the blink, hissing, spitting and stealing the occasional scene; and the recorded Star-Wars-parodying prologue firing up again soon after it finished; oh and, script-wise, possible over-use of the word “faggot”.

A feeling of satisfaction washes over what has been a responsive auditorium as the players take a bow. This went down well. And the headline is: It works.