

Welcome to the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare!

You are listening to a recording of the pre-show description written by Elizabeth Montigny. This includes a layout of the Boston Common, notes about the show, and a description of the set, actors, and their costumes. The pre-show description runs about 20 minutes and at the performance you may hear some broadcast announcements in the background.

Ruth Kahn is your primary describer and will join you for the show.

Here's the layout of the Boston Common. This description has been provided by Audio Describer, Cori Couture.

BOSTON COMMON DETAILS

From a bird's-eye view, Boston Common is a 5-sided park, with a spider web of pathways extending from the Parkman Bandstand just below its center. Its five sides are:

- **Beacon Street**, along the top, which meets **Park Street** at the Massachusetts State House in the top-right corner.
- Park Street is the shortest side, and runs at a slight outward angle to the right, ending at **Park Street T Station**.
- From here, **Tremont Street** cuts downward and slightly to the left, to the **Boylston Street T Station**, near the **AMC movie theatre**.
- **Boylston Street** itself runs along the bottom of the Common...
- meeting up with **Charles Street**, which runs back upward and slightly to the left, to meet **Beacon Street** and complete the outline.

Shakespeare on the Common is presented near the Parkman Bandstand, a stately circular structure with tall pillars and a domed roof. If you think of this area as a clock, the bandstand is behind you at 6:00, the stage is at

12:00, and **audience seating fills the whole clock FACE** and is bisected by a pathway. Park Street and Park Street Station are off in the distance, beyond 3:00, while the **Access tent** is at about 9:00. This is where you picked up your **audio description receivers and headsets**.

Seats **above** the bisecting path (closer to the stage and Beacon Street beyond) are cornered off and filled with lawn chairs. You are most likely seated in this access services section, in front of the stage.

Open, *public* seating begins *below* the path, and extends out in all directions. People sit on blankets and lawn chairs, many enjoying picnics. The Earl of Sandwich kiosk is beyond the access tent at 9:00, while Port-a-potties are **behind and between** the bandstand and access tent at about 7:00.

This performance runs 2 hours with NO intermission so use the restrooms before the show begins or forever hold it.

The audio description broadcasting tent is in front of the bandstand, at about 7:00.

DIRECTOR NOTES:

And now for some background on the inspiration and setting for this *Much Ado About Nothing*.

This comedy is set in the 1990's. Director Megan Sandberg-Zakian shares her inspiration for this choice in the program. I will read an excerpt:

Quote "... I thought about the last time American soldiers returned triumphantly from the battlefield - in the early 90s after the first Gulf war, known as Operation Desert Storm. Pop culture still featured the bright colors and big hair of the 1980s, but a potent undercurrent of hip-hop, grunge, and queer theory was there, too. Voila: the 90s-inspired world you'll see tonight!

... making Beatrice and Benedick both women helped me to understand why their friends' assistance (and approval) is so critical in bringing their epic love story to its satisfying conclusion." End quote.

I will highlight more production credits as we go along...

SYNOPSIS

Next, I will read to you the synopsis for *Much Ado About Nothing* as it appears in the program.

Quote "The war is over. Don Pedro, an army General, arrives with his regiment, including Benedick and Claudio, at the home of Leonato, father of Hero and uncle of Beatrice.

Claudio falls in love with Hero and their marriage is agreed upon. Beatrice and Benedick despise love and engage in comic banter.

The others plot to make them fall in love with each other, by a trick in which Benedick will overhear her friends talking of Beatrice's supposed secret love for her, and vice versa.

Meanwhile Don John, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother and a disgraced soldier, contrives a more malicious plot with the assistance of his follower Borachio: Claudio is led to believe that he has witnessed Hero in a compromising situation on the night before her wedding day - in fact it is Hero's maid Margaret with Borachio.

Claudio denounces Hero during the marriage ceremony and she faints. On the advice of the Friar, who is convinced of her innocence, Leonato announces that Hero is dead. Beatrice demands that Benedick should kill Claudio." End quote.

And I will stop here so as not to reveal the ending.

Before we dive into the description of the set, actors, and costumes, I want to **welcome those of you just joining us**. [You are listening to a recording of the pre-show description, your primary describer, Ruth Kahn, will join you live a little later...]

For everyone's benefit, let's review our location.

We are near the Parkman Bandstand. If you think of this area as a clock, the bandstand is behind you at 6:00, the stage is at 12:00, and **audience seating fills the whole clock FACE** and is bisected by a pathway. Park Street and Park Street Station are off in the distance, beyond 3:00, while the **Access tent** is at about 9:00. This is where you picked up your **audio description receivers and headsets**.

Seats **above** the bisecting path (closer to the stage and Beacon Street beyond) are cornered off and filled with lawn chairs. You are most likely seated in this access services section, in front of the stage.

Please be aware actors use the center aisle inside the reserved seating area to go up to the stage.

Open, *public* seating begins *below* the path, and extends out in all directions. People sit on blankets and lawn chairs, many enjoying picnics. The Earl of Sandwich kiosk is beyond the access tent at 9:00, while Port-a-potties are behind and in between the bandstand and access tent at about 7:00. This performance runs 2 hours with NO intermission so if you need to use those, now is the time.

The audio description broadcasting tent, where Ruth is sitting, is just in front of the bandstand, at about 7:00.

SET DESCRIPTION

Let's dive into the description of the set. Scenic Designer Lawrence E. Moten III and Associated Scenic Designer Daniel Allen have created a life-sized facade of a two-story mansion with a terrace in front, which opens

up to a lawn. This is a multi-purpose setting for scenes inside and outside, including halls and rooms in Leonato's and Antonio's home, a church, and a prison. Ruth will let you know where the scenes take place.

The front of Leonato's and Antonio's Mediterranean style house spans the width of the stage and is divided into parallel sections (left, center, right) by gold columns. Above the first floor portico is an arched balcony. The actors use black spiral staircases on either side of the house to move between the two stories.

The first story portico features brown paneled arched double-doors at the center and on either side of the doors is an arched window with brown trim. The windows don't open but sometimes we can see lights from within. Sitting in front of each window is a small concrete curved bench, like you might find in a garden.

The second story balcony has a gold replica of the statue David in the center. David is known for strength and youthful beauty. He is nude with a slingshot in hand slung over his shoulder, getting ready for his battle with Goliath.

On the wall to either side of the statue David's head is a light fixture. On the floor, lining the wall on either side of the statue are pots of colorful flowers. To the far left and right of the statue, directly above the arched windows in the portico, is a single brown paneled door. A wrought iron railing lines the front of the balcony.

In front of the house is what we're calling the terrace. The terrace is an open area bordered with a balustrade, this is a row of small columns topped by a rail. The balustrade lines the left and right sides of the terrace and in the front it comes toward the center a few feet, then opens up to a wide staircase of four steps leading down to what we're calling the lawn.

At the inside end of the green hedges separating the terrace and lawn stand gold statues. To our left is Marcellus and on our right is Venus.

Marcellus is a sculpture of the god of eloquence. Marcellus stands nude with a robe draped over his left arm.

Venus symbolizes the goddess Aphrodite, famous as a symbol of female beauty. This statue appears to be a bathing Venus. She is nude, bent slightly at the waist, her right foot is pointed forward and her left leg is bent with a robe draped over it.

On either side of the lawn stands a black wrought iron bench. About five feet in front of each bench is a set of three steps that lead down to the audience level. Stone vases with colorful blooming flowers are perched on either side of these steps. Actors use the center aisle inside the reserved seating area to go up these steps to the lawn area of the stage.

A frame of metal scaffolding holding lighting equipment stands on the outside corners of the stage and line the perimeter along the top. Something fun to see pre-show are two-spotlight operators scaling the front left and right scaffolding and perching themselves there for the duration of the show to operate the spots. Lighting Designers Eric Southern and Maximo Grano De Oro throw out bright hues in pink and blue and in later scenes create a dance party atmosphere with pulsing color.

Now I will highlight some featured props, Ruth will let you know when these appear:

In the early party scene, the theme is an “enchanted forest”, in which some characters wear full face animal masks and others wear bright, bedazzled eye masks. The animal masks are painted paper mache, we see Beatrice in a pink feathered mask; Benedick in purple feathered mask w/ a butterfly; Claudio as a stag with flower covered antlers; Hero in a lighted blue mask; Don John as a lamb, and Don Pedro as a red bird. Ensemble members wear a fox with branches and foliage attached and a black and gold owl.

For the wedding scene, a wooden free-standing trellis adorned with white roses is carried on and off the terrace. Flower garlands are swagged along the railing of the balcony and on the lawn benches. Satin white banners in the shape of a small shield and trimmed in gold are draped off the railing of the balcony. Later, these banners are replaced with black ones for a funeral.

ACTORS & COSTUME DESCRIPTIONS

Now I'll describe the actors' appearance, using their self-descriptions, and I will describe their costumes. Costume Designer Kathleen Doyle and Assistant Costume Designer Miranda Giurleo use primary and neon colors with a mix of hip hop, grunge, and bohemian styles.

Let's begin with the couples.

Leonato & Antonio are a gay couple. Remo Airaldi plays Leonato, governor of Messina and Hero's father. Remo describes himself as, quote "I am a short, Latinx, gay man in my late 50's. I have short [salt n' pepper] hair and a beard." End quote. Leonato always appears in a light gray three-piece suit and light blue necktie. By contrast, Antonio shows up in shades of red in flashy prints.

John Kuntz plays Antonio, quote "brother" end quote of Leonato. John describes himself as, quote "I'm a white, gay, cis man in my mid-50s with spiky dark hair." End quote. [Cis is short for cisgender, which means the person's gender corresponds with their birth sex.] When Antonio first enters on Leonato's arm, he seems relaxed in black silk pajamas with a palm tree print. Over this he has a red peignoir, or sheer robe, trimmed in red faux fur. In another scene, Antonio has on a white kaftan with a swirling print of reds and pinks. When he's dressed for more formal events he has a red and gold brocade jacket and red straight leg pants. Antonio often gestures with a folding hand fan of solid red.

Beatrice & Benedick are a lesbian couple. Rachael Warren plays Beatrice describes herself as, quote "I am a white, gay, cis woman in my 40's. I use

she/her pronouns. I have short brown hair, a nose piercing & several tattoos on my arms & torso.” End quote. Beatrice first strides up the center aisle in a neon pink pants suit with a pink graphic t-shirt and neon pink suitcase. Later we see her in more casual outfits of relaxed, bohemian tops and faded denim jeans. Beatrice often wears a stack of bracelets. In the wedding scene, she has on a purple v-neck dress with a loose kimono like shawl in purple in white. The fringe on purple suede ankle boots sways as she moves about.

Tia James plays Benedick, a lord and soldier from Padua, and describes herself as, quote “I am a Black woman, for hair I have locs that are long and hang past my waist. I just turned 40!!! ~~I do wear glasses, I love wearing glasses, but sometimes I'll have my contacts in.~~ I go by she/her.” End quote. Benedick wears either the desert fatigues with a white tank top or army dress green uniform and she wears large gold hoop earrings. In her civilian outfit, she wears a knit top and leather pants in shades of purple and lilac.

Hero & Claudio are a straight couple. Rebecca-Anne Wittaker plays Hero, daughter of Leonato. Rebecca-Ann describes herself as: quote “I'm a Black woman in my 20s. I have curly dark brown hair and dark brown eyes. My pronouns are she/her.” End quote. Hero is the first character we see on stage and she sports an athleisure look. She walks onto the balcony through the right side door and puts on her walkman over her long dark braids. A walkman is a cassette player with headphones. Hero then bops down the right spiral staircase in a bright yellow tank top, paired with faded denim shorts, and bright yellow sweat socks and sneakers. For the party in the enchanted forest, Hero glows in a blue sleeveless cocktail length dress with a full tulle overlay skirt. The trim of her dress glows blue, as if lined with glow sticks. On her feet are shiny gold ballet slipper flats. Later she wears those same flats with her tea length wedding dress in cream taffeta. It is cut in much the same style as the blue dress but has a large bow at the back and has a retro 50s feel. Hero's lace wedding veil shimmers with accents of silver jewels and glitter.

Erik Robles plays Claudio, of Florence, a count. Erik describes himself as, quote: “I am a 5 foot 10 inch, brown, early twenties afro-latino man identifying as he/him/his.” End quote. Claudio is in his desert fatigues with a white tank top underneath and for formal events put on his dress green uniform and black beret.

Borachio & Margaret are a lesbian couple. Sarah Corey plays Borachio, who is a follower of Don John. Sarah describes herself as, quote “I’m a half Lebanese, half Jewish cis-gender woman who looks 30s-early 40s. I’m pretty short in flat feet - 5’3”; I have very dark curly brown hair past my shoulders, olive skin, and dark brown eyes. I’m athletic and curvy.” End quote. Borachio has her hair pulled back at the front and sides and wears large gold hoop earrings. She pairs a black tank top with her desert fatigue pants and black combat boots. Borachio often pulls a red and silver flask from her pocket and sips it.

Siobhan Carroll plays Margaret, waiting-gentlewoman attendant on Hero. Siobhan describes herself as, quote “I am a white woman in my 20s with long, light brown hair and dark brown eyes. My pronouns are she/her.” End quote. Margaret wears a chartreuse cropped hoodie and high waisted ruffled miniskirt belted with a magenta fanny pack. Her hair is pulled up in a ponytail.

And now for the rest of the cast.

The Soldiers:

They are in desert fatigues, this is in shades of brown and tan camouflage, and much like their tank tops, the good guys have sand colored combat boots and the bad guys have black combat boots.

Michael Underhill plays Don Pedro, Prince of Argan. Michael describes himself as, quote “I am a white cis-man in my thirties - I have an athletic build with a short military haircut.” End quote. Don Pedro has a light brown mustache and sometimes sports aviator sunglasses. In some scenes, his desert fatigue jacket is off and he is in a white tank top.

Gunnar Manchester plays Don John, quote “the Bastard Prince” end quote, brother of Don Pedro. Gunnar describes himself as, quote “I’m a tall Scandinavian man in my late 20’s. Fair white skin, shoulder-length dirty blonde hair, a short beard, and blue-green eyes.” End quote. Don John lets his hair hang loose and ties his desert fatigue jacket around his waist. He wears a black tank top and black leather fingerless gloves.

Servants & attendants:

Zoe Abuyuan plays Jade, a servant of Leonato’s house, and she describes herself as, quote “half-white, half-Filipino woman in her mid 20s with straight, dark brown hair with bangs and hazel eyes.” End quote. Jade slouches in a goth ensemble. Her black leather jacket is over an untucked black shirt and paired with a short denim skirt. Jade has black ripped fishnet stockings and black combat boots. The sides of her hair are tied up into small buns on top of her head.

The Friar and the Sexton:

Siobhan Juanita Brown plays Friar Francis, a pastor, and she describes herself as, quote “I am a light skinned, woman of color with long, wavy, gray hair. I am an African American, Mexican and Wampanoag cis female in my fifth decade. I use nakum [na coom], she, her, hers pronouns.” End quote. The Friar wears a loose fitting solid blue tunic and matching wide leg pants. When she first appears, she has a stole draped over her shoulders in a weave of thick gold and white fabric. The next time we see her, her stole is a rainbow weave and she has a headband of flowers in rainbow colors.

Nettie Chickering plays the Sexton or judge, and describes herself as, quote “I use she/her pronouns. I am a young, black woman. I have long, black braids which curl at the ends.” End quote. The Sexton stands taking notes in a portfolio in a solid yellow dress under a blue blazer. Her hair is mostly covered by a wide scarf headwrap in red and gold.

The Constable and the Watchmen:

Debra Wise plays Dogberry, the Constable. She describes herself as, quote “I am a white woman in my 60's.” End quote. Dogberry is outfitted in a dark green park ranger uniform with a safari style hat of the same color over her short salt n’ pepper hair. She holds a child’s baton tucked under her arm and gestures with it. The three Watchmen have matching green sashes with badges across their torso, like something a girl scout or cub scout would wear, and casual shirts and shorts. Over this, each wears a reflective harness and carries their own baton. The Watchmen are a silly bunch with distinct looks - one is fair skinned with a blunt bob and glasses, another is tall and husky with curly brown hair that sticks up and large glasses, and another is clean cut and pale in a baseball cap.

And, that’s a wrap on the named characters in the program.

CLOSING

This concludes the pre-show description for *Much Ado About Nothing*. Friendly reminder, there is no intermission for this 2-hour performance. Ruth Kahn will be with you to describe this comedy after some show announcements. Thank you to Access Advocate Christopher Robinson and Access Coordinator Stacey D’Onofrio for making this accessible production possible.

Enjoy the show!