

Shakespeare Meets Speakeasy in a Roaring Rendition of *Much Ado About Nothing*

By **DEVON GOHDE**

WESTFIELD – When one thinks of a William Shakespeare play, they might imagine a 16th-century England setting with over-the-top costumes. However, the 2025-2026 season opener for the Westfield Community Players' production of *Much Ado About Nothing* takes place in 1920s Long Island but still adheres to the Early Modern English script.

Director David Baker stated he was drawn to the era because the setting of this production mirrored the play's story, feeling like one of Gatsby's parties, "a play of glittering masks and disguises where no one is quite who they seem." The juxtaposition of the play's setting and the Shakespearean language spoken makes this production a standout. Using the magic of theatre to blend time periods and genres Set in the courtyard of Leonatos (Ed Faver) house *MuchAdoAbout Nothing* follows Don Pedro (Tim McGovern) and two soldiers Benedict (Sean Buckley) and Claudio (Devin Freeman) who are welcome to Leonatos home where Claudio soon falls for his daughter Hero (Hannah Portmann) and together they try to set up Benedict and her cousin Beatrice (Sarah

Sterling) who are both hard headed individuals who refuse to settle down.

However, the excitement of love in the air is in trouble when Don Pedro's scheming brother, Don John (Laura Anthony), is determined to stop the happy couple from marrying.

Buckley and Sterling shine as the fiery Benedick and Beatrice—their comedic timing is excellent, and their back-and-forth spats bring real energy to the stage. Yet they also stand out individually, bringing the audience to laughter not only with their performances but also through expressive facial reactions and physical comedy. Whether teasing each other or reacting silently from the sidelines, their performances are full of personality and vulnerability when their characters begin to fall for each other.

Anthony, as the scheming Don John, is captivating to watch; their way of speaking in a 1920s gangster accent, reciting Shakespearean words, really brings the production together. The contrast between the classical language and the stylized delivery injects fresh energy into the role and adds a layer of charisma to the character's villainy.



While the idea of watching a Shakespearean play might seem daunting—especially with the challenges of Early Modern English — this production proves that the language is no barrier to enjoyment. The cast brings out the humor, suspense, and drama in every scene, making the story fun and engaging for all audiences. Baker has crafted a fun and unique show, blending classic text with creative choices that keep the energy high and the audience thoroughly entertained.

Much Ado About Nothing will be playing at Westfield Community Players until October 25th. For tickets, visit www.wcptheatre.org or call [\(908\) 232-1221](tel:9082321221) for more information.



WILL THEY OR WON'T THEY? Benedick (Sean Buckley) and Beatrice (Sarah Stirling) are frequently sparring throughout Westfield Community Players' *"Much Ado About Nothing."* The Shakespearean comedy runs weekends through October 25. Tickets available at wcptheatre.org.