Life

'TWELFTH NIGHT' OPENS WITH JOVIAL CHARM



Sandy Borerro portrays Lady Olivia in Twelfth Night. The Shakespeare play opened in the Nafe Katter Theater on Friday, Oct. 16.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MATTIAS LUNDBLAD

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Disclaimer: Ali Bokhari is a Grab Photographer for The Daily Campus

The opening night performance of William Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" graced the University of Connecticut's Nafe Katter Theatre on Friday.

The humor-filled show was the first production from the Connecticut Repertory Theatre this semester and was directed by guest director Daniela Varon.

The contemporary take on the beloved comedy classic remained largely faithful to the original script and tone, but there was plenty of modern flair. Throughout the performance, a variety of added sexual innuendos and dramatized sequences drew laughter from the audience.

The story focuses on the fate of twin siblings Sebastian (Justin Boutin) and Viola after a disastrous storm at sea, which sends them ashore on the fictional kingdom of Illyria. Separated and believing each other dead, Sebastian tries to get his bearings while Viola disguises herself as a male page and goes by the name Cesario. After Viola enlists her services to Duke Orsino (Zachary Russell), an entanglement of romantic courting and identity confusion occurs.

While the original "Twelfth Night" script starts after the shipwreck occurs, the CRT production opened with a dramatized re-enactment of the storm, with the cast trying to tame large sheets representative of sails. The disaster played out amidst dramatic blue lighting that struck the set, which included an ornately colored balcony piece and a piano that rolled around the floor throughout the play.

"I thought the set design was really good," said Wesley Smith, a first-semester acting BFA student. "I thought the use of the piano, how they moved it in every scene, was really cool. And I thought the actors were brilliant."

Ali Bokhari, a third-semester acting BFA student and one of the set crew workers, said the set crew only started working on the set two weeks before the show's premiere, while the actors worked on the play for two months.

The first few scenes remained mostly serious, with Akur Oryem's performance as Viola/Cesario perfectly capturing the characters' fear and stress while committing such deception. In contrast, Chris Martin's portrayal as Malvolio, the steward of Olivia's household, channeled the character's exaggerated, stiff sternness.

The merriment truly began when Sir Toby Belch, played by Bryan Anderson, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, played by Christopher Cazarin, drunkenly stumbled down the stairs from the back of the theater. Their banter and frequent breaking into dancing or falling brought multiple waves of laughter from the audience.

Another captivating early scene came when Belch and Aguecheek joined Feste, the fool played by Grace Darling, in rambunctious partying. The trio pranced around the stage with a gong, cowbell, maracas and other loud knickknacks, which brought a screaming fit from a trying-to-sleep Malvolio.

Sophia Christiano, a first-semester psychology and theater student at the University of Pittsburgh, said the scene where Malvolio reads a letter forged and planned by Olivia's maid, Maria (Julia Smith), Belch and Aguecheek was one of her favorites. She said she flew out to see the performance as she had friends in the cast and production crew.

"He did part of [the reading] to me, which was so cool, so immersive," Christiano said. "I was just smiling ear to ear; I was so giddy watching. He was looking right at me... a couple actors did that. They looked into your soul."

After a 10-minute intermission, a slew of high-action scenes followed. Malvolio reappeared with a new demeanor as a result of the other characters' prank letter, looking and acting like a fool himself. Confused clashes ensued between Viola and Aguecheek, and later between Sebastian and Belch, with each fight filled with the characters prancing around and screaming in fright, reluctant to hit each other.

While more and more absurd humor trickled into the play as it went on, the serious moments were still enacted with care. After getting locked up for seeming madness, Malvolio endures tormenting from Feste, whom he cannot see in his dark cell. But instead of putting Malvolio in a literal cage, the cast shackles him to the legs of the ever-present piano, just one of the many creative uses of the piano throughout the night.

Once the confusion settled, which each actor rendered perfectly, the play ended with the cast dancing and singing amongst each other while a bitter Malvolio watched scornfully from the platform above.

Brennan Davies, a seventh-semester student majoring in design in technical theater, was the lighting designer for the play. He said it was his second time working on a CRT production.

"It was great to work with the rest of the design team," Davies said. "I try to help bring the director's vision to life and work with the rest of the design team to create something that is cohesive to telling the story of the show."

There will be seven more performances of "Twelfth Night" between Tuesday and Sunday. The Thursday night show has a discounted $5 ticket price for students and $20 for UConn faculty and staff.



Akur Oryem plays Viola/Cesario in Twelfth Night at the Connecticut Repertory Theater. The Shakespeare play opened in the Nafe Katter Theater on Friday, Oct. 16, 2026.

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SUBOG Weekly Events:

October 19th - November 8th

November 4th – GTA VI Trivia @ 7:00 pm in the Student Union Theatre

November 5th - Coffee House @ 4:30 pm at the Benton Museum

November 6th – Jersey Day @ 6:00 pm in SU 325

November 7th – Harvest Fest @ 12:00 pm on the Student Union Mall

November 8th – Amazing Race @ 11:00 am across campus

Any questions? Email subog@uconn.edu



Chris Martin acts as Malvolio in Twelfth Night. The Connecticut Repertory Theater's rendition of the Shakespeare play opened in the Nafe Katter Theater on Friday, Oct. 16, 2026.

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