

SWEET
NIGHT



A NEW STAGING BY PIG IRON THEATRE COMPANY

SELECTED PRESS

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- Helen Shaw, Time Out New York

"I've enjoyed seeing multiple Twelfth Nights...
Wonderful actors have handled each of the play's roles.
But I have never seen better than Sarah Sanford's lovestruck, boyish, feminine interpretation of Viola / Cesario in this Pig Iron production."
- Kathryn Osenlund, CurtainUp.com



"Pig Iron's Twelfth Night is true to Shakespeare (a good thing), and truly Pig Iron (a very good thing)...remarkably clear, incisive, smart performances by all..James Sugg's Keith Richards in a pink suit breathes new life into drunken Sir Toby... after all the laughs, something elegant remains. Pure magic."

- Mark Cofta, Citypaper

"A wild rumpus of a show...stuffed with terrific performances...Sarah Sanford [is] splendid...Dan Rothenberg directs with his usual bizarre élan."
- Toby Zinman, Philadelphia Inquirer

"The best Shakespeare production we've ever seen...this Twelfth Night is goddamn hysterical. It really is."
- Emily Guendelsberger, The Onion AV Club



Get out of town to see Pig Iron Theatre Company

Pig Iron Theatre Company tackles Shakespeare in Philly.

It's that time again, people. It's time to go to the west side of Ninth Avenue, where the cheap buses line up, and it's time to get your \$8 ticket to Philadelphia. Already you have let the first week of the Live Arts Festival slip by! And you mustn't let that happen, because there, on the other side of our beloved Liberty Bell, lurks a marvelous piece of entertainment: Pig Iron Theatre Company's production of *Twelfth Night*.

New Yorkers have already had plenty of opportunity to admire the mad whirligig that is Pig Iron—just last year we goggled at Chekhov Lizardbrain, which is the play you get if you tie up a poignant Russian realist and tickle him. Pig Iron somehow manages to combine longevity (16 years!) with an eternally fresh gladness. Steeped in the serious aspects of play, they have worked with just about everybody (including experimental-theater god Joe Chaikin) in their confident progress toward the devised-theater pantheon.

The troupe hasn't, though, worked much with playwrights' texts per se, and so by going straight to Shakespeare, it sets itself a pretty steep learning curve. Luckily, the creators put that curve right onstage—Maiko Matsushima's blocky gray set has a 12-foot-high quarter-pipe swoop built in. Actors race up it, slide down it and generally make mockery and mayhem to their hearts' content. Dan Rothenberg's ebullient production takes place in that least cheerful Illyria, Yugoslavia in the 1960s. Happily, *Twelfth Night* fizzes in any glass you find for it, so we find ourselves seeing the silly side of concrete architecture, horrible sweaters, Gypsy music (by Rosie Langabeer), and legions of heavy black beards.

I can not with a straight face say that I felt a great need to see another *Twelfth Night*—if it's not overproduced than let us say that it is certainly produced enough—but I suddenly find that it was absolutely necessary to see parts of this one. In that imaginary, perfect, fantasy-football-type production that we all keep building toward in our minds, I now have an Olivia (Birgit Huppuch, giddy and embarrassed with love for the first time), a Feste (strange, quiet Scott Greer singing under his breath) and a truly perfect Sir Toby Belch. Oh! Pig Iron regular James Sugg! There's something so wonderfully wrong with you. In a show in which the general buffoonery level is superb, Sugg's Belch rips forth with woozy hilarousness—a vision of hair dragged into a drunkard's halo, a fallen angel slurring even his pauses.

- Helen Shaw

The Philadelphia Inquirer

September 6, 2011

Twelfth Night. Pig Iron Theatre Company, the crown prince of the radical avant-garde, goes mainstream: This year it's Shakespeare, the comfy Suzanne Roberts Theatre, the works. Which is not to say its *Twelfth Night* is not a wild rumpus of a show, full of wailing gypsy music (by Rosie Langabeer) played by an (overused) band, and stuffed with terrific performances.

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is about twins, gender confusion, and love - passionate, crazy, I'll-die-if-I-don't-have-you love. Pig Iron's *Twelfth Night* is about all that stuff but gives the drunks, the cruel noblemen, and the rude servants much more stage time.

One of the many casting triumphs is that Sarah Sanford (splendid as Viola disguised as a boy) and Blake DeLong (playing her long-lost twin brother Sebastian) look ridiculously alike. Another is Dito van Reigersberg's hilariously elegant Duke Orsino.

The surprise is Scott Greer as Feste the Fool. It is a brilliant and subtle and funny performance, and never have I heard the delicate "Hey, ho, the wind and the rain" sung more movingly.

The messy set (designed by Maiko Matsushima) makes great use of a skateboard ramp as characters use it to zoom in and out. Dan Rothenberg directs with his usual bizarre élan.

- Toby Zinman



Pig Iron's *Twelfth Night* is the best Shakespeare we've ever seen

We're not just saying that



By Emily Guendelsberger September 15, 2011

We haven't really been reviewing much of the Fringe/Live Arts stuff we've caught thus far this year on the rationale that it's pointless to rip into something if there aren't any more performances and the group is unlikely to be participating next year/the venue was so ill-suited to the show that most of the dialogue sounded like it was being performed by Charlie Brown's teacher/it was a one-off from out-of-towners who seemed to be under the Fringe umbrella almost by accident.

But! We saw Pig Iron's *Twelfth Night* at Suzanne Roberts Theatre last night, and it is just fantastic. We'd even say it's the best Shakespeare production we've ever seen. It's really tough to bring clarity of meaning to Shakespearean language without going into over-obvious pantomime, and it's really, *really* tough to clarify the old-old-old-school jokes enough to get true laughter out of an audience, the kind you would get at *Airplane!* or *Knocked Up*, instead of half of it being that awkward "HA HA HA that was a JOKE and I know this because I have READ THE PLAY unlike the rest of you ignoramuses around me who are not laughing!"

But this *Twelfth Night* is goddamn hysterical. It really is. Especially the Fool. We'd do a review, but what could we really say that **every other theater critic in town** hasn't already said? In any event, there are **four performances left**, and we highly recommend you catch one.

[No, Pig Iron did not buy a lot of ads. Or if they did, we don't know about it. —ed.]



Live Arts & Philly Fringe Reviews: "Friends of Alcatraz," "The Aliens" and "Twelfth Night"

By J. Cooper Robb and Nicole Finkbiner

Posted Sep. 14, 2011

No Holds Bard

Pig Iron's take on Shakespeare's Twelfth Night.

By J. Cooper Robb

If you've ever been bored by Shakespeare in the past (and seriously, who hasn't?), Pig Iron Theatre Company's production of *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* makes the play not only easily understandable but surprisingly stirring. Easily one of the company's most assured productions (Dan Rothenberg's direction is as astute as it is thoughtful), Pig Iron brings a new vitality and clarity to Shakespeare's 411-year-old play.

The story revolves around a brother and sister who besides their gender difference are identical in appearance. Following a shipwreck, the two are separated. The sister, Viola, (the excellent Sarah Sanford) disguises herself as a man, falls in love with the local Duke (a velvety smooth Dito van Reigersberg), and inadvertently stirs the simmering passions of the fair Lady Olivia (the slyly funny Birgit Huppuch). When the sister and brother are finally reunited, genders are revealed, heterosexuality is preserved, and general happiness ensues.

Most of the focus is on the romantic dealings between the Duke, Viola and Olivia, but the genius of *Twelfth Night* lies in the subplot involving the roguish Sir Toby (James Sugg) and his inept companion Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Andy Paterson). Sir Toby has seemingly made a career out of self-indulgence. In a magnetic performance Sugg's Sir Toby is like a rock 'n' roll demigod, only far more hedonistic. Whereas most productions downplay the viciousness of the pranks pulled by Sir Toby and his cohorts, Pig Iron boldly depicts the full extent of the brutality involved. A drunkard who is as reckless as he is gleeful, Toby seeks revenge against the prudish Malvolio (Michael Sean McGuinness). Toby's scheme against his enemy is humorous, but it is also needlessly cruel, and in Rothenberg's staging we are simultaneously laughing and cringing as we watch Malvolio's humiliation.

Through Sept. 17. \$25-\$30. Suzanne Roberts Theatre. 480 S. Broad St.



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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2011

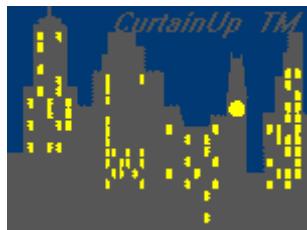
ON THE FRINGE: Twelfth Night, or What You Will

Pig Iron's *Twelfth Night* is true to Shakespeare (a good thing), and truly Pig Iron (a very good thing). This girl-disguised-as-boy romantic comedy soars under Dan Rothenberg's direction, with near-constant onstage accompaniment by Rosie Langabeer's gypsy musicians, and remarkably clear, incisive, smart performances by all. I've never seen a Feste so caustic, cryptic, yet cuddly as Scott Greer, and James Sugg's Keith Richards in a pink suit breathes new life into drunken Sir Toby. Maiko Matsushima's set includes a quarter-pipe slide that adds to the fun — but after all the laughs, something elegant remains. Pure magic.



Through Sept. 17, \$25, Suzanne Roberts Theatre, 480 S. Broad St. [MORE INFO HERE.](#)

Posted by Mark Cofta @ 12:40 PM [Permalink](#) | [On the Fringe](#) |



CurtainUp

The Internet Theater Magazine of Reviews, Features, Annotated Listings

A *CurtainUp* Review Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe

[Kathryn Osenlund](#)

Twelfth Night



Pig Iron's *Twelfth Night*

Opening night of a Pig Iron Live Arts show is an EVENT, the epitome of avant garde cachet. But last night it looked like the occasion would be, well, mainstream — the performance of a popular Shakespeare play in a beautiful theater.

The question has been floating around: Why is an experimental theater company, celebrated for blazing trails and creating new material, presenting a text-based warhorse at the Live Arts Festival? This *Twelfth Night* is not transposed into new work, like for instance, their *Isabella* ('07), which was a re-imagined *Measure for Measure*. Questions are whispered in worried tones: Is Pig Iron turning into just another first-rate acting company?

Do the experimenters look at tackling an oft-performed Shakespeare gem as an experiment? It's a relief to be able to report that they can produce a rollicking, not quite traditionally staged play with their inimitable POV, physicality, intelligence, attention to detail, inspired set design & costuming, and music. Gypsy music. . .why not?

I've enjoyed seeing multiple *Twelfth Nights* (including the all male production at the New Globe when Mark Rylance was artistic director). Wonderful actors have handled each of the play's roles. But I have never seen better than Sarah Sanford's lovestruck, boyish, feminine interpretation of Viola / Cesario in this Pig Iron production.

All of these actors give el primo performances: Blake Delong, Scott Greer, Birgit Huppuch, Charleigh Parker, Andy Paterson, Sarah Sanford, James Sugg, Alex Torra, Dito van Reigersberg. And the musicians enchant too.

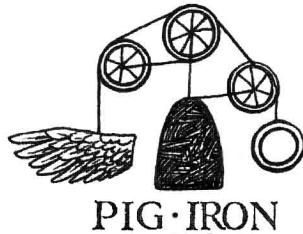
As inimitable self-centered Duke Orsino, Dito van Reigersberg enjoys his lovesickness until he (along with Olivia and Sebastian) learns to love the one you're with. James Sugg brings exuberance to inebriated, carousing Sir Toby, who is centrally positioned to carry much of the weight of the show. Michael Sean McGuinness provides dignity as poor, officious Malvolio who suffers from an excess of decorum and an unsuitable love

for his boss. Perhaps the production goes a bit too far in making him appear more foolish than he already is in his cross gartered yellow stockings.

Scott Greer is an inspired choice to play Feste, the melancholy, some might say cranky, fool. Greer has gravitas even in his half-bald fright wig, and his performance of the famous, sobering little closing song is beautiful in its simplicity. (Is there a parallel here between the lyrics about leaving childish stuff behind and growing up, and Pig Iron maturing, opening a school, and settling in?)

Pig Iron's director Dan Rothenberg must be heavy duty into infrastructure, as his whole approach appears to be from the inside out, rather than the norm, which is vice versa. The actors' attentiveness to the basics of character and situation, reflex to action and movement, and their way of playing off each other make this performance tick. The many little touches, like the antics of two nearly identical attendants, add to the hilarity. Still, *Twelfth Night*'s darker tones just surface from under the excessive revelry and party 'til you drop 'tude.

And where is Pig Iron headed? The only thing we can be pretty sure of is that whatever course they take, with their vision and their singular and combined talents, they'll continue turning out some of the best theater that Philadelphia or any place else has to offer. At Suzanne Roberts Theatre. 2 hours and 45 minutes. 1 intermission. Live Arts Festival.



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