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# The Babala Boys

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## *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

by William Shakespeare  
Directed by Jared Sakren

[Southwest Shakespeare Company](#)

The Anita Cox-Farnsworth Studio Theater at the [Mesa Arts Center, Mesa](#)  
(480) 641-7039

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\$32.00

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Generally noted as Shakespeare's first work, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is also one of his lesser-produced works. Not quite as well rounded as his later romantic comedies, it still is recognizably Shakespearean with heightened language, cross-dressing, mistaken identities, nearly tragic consequences, and Love with the big "L." The ending is a bit of a stretch, but there's lots of fun getting there. Director **Jared Sakren** plops these two gentlemen into a great locale: pre-revolutionary Cuba. **Paul Sannerud's** decaying terra cotta archway becomes all different locales of Cuba, from rustic through cosmopolitan to jungle. Many of the actors are very funny adding a Latin flair to their roles. Sakren has them play it broadly, at a speedy clip, and expansively. It sweeps about the thrust space, and though it is sometimes hard to hear the language when actors are facing away from you, the performances are still quite enjoyable.

The two gentlemen of the title are Proteus (**Joseph Kremer**) and Valentine (**Eric Schoen**). Proteus stays home in rural Verona to woo his beloved Julia (**Sarah Hayes**), while Valentine flies to the big city of Milan and falls for the Duke's daughter Silvia (**Danette Linker**). Proteus is forced to follow Valentine to Milan, where he maneuvers Valentine out of the picture by exposing his elopement plans to the Duke (**Larry Soller**) and pursues Silvia. Julia follows Proteus, dons the clothes of a man, and catches him in the midst of his fickle ways. All the while, their clownish servants Speed (**Franc Gaxiola**) and Launce (**Pete Good**) drag a dog (**Vaquero**) around the stage, fall over each other, and act generally clownish. Things get desperate, but this is a romantic comedy, so you know where it's all headed.

Kremer is wonderful as Proteus. He expands his presentation to incorporate physical comedy, double takes, and facial mugging that adds greatly to his offering. Balancing him, Schoen is more subdued. He has a few moments of humor especially during his conversations with the Duke and the band of outlaws, but overall, Kremer outshines him, unbalancing the effort. One would have expected his portrayal to expand greatly at the end of the evening after his exile changes him, but he's still the same nice guy, and that's a shame. The same is true of the two women. Hayes is sweet and expressive, and really scores when she transforms into a man, but Linker's Silvia is a one-note effort. She seems to expand toward the very end, but never escapes her strained vocalization and stoic facial expression.

There is a balance, though, and it comes from the clowns. Gaxiola and Good are their usual hilarious selves, with Gaxiola playing dumb for effect, and Good playing over-the-top to a similar end. **Amanda Schaar**, as Julia's waiting woman, is a firecracker, and threatens to overwhelm the two major scenes she has with Hayes. It's odd that costumer **Annette Crimson** would put Schaar in such an

interesting outfit and allow Haye's opening dress to be upstaged by it. For the remainder of the costuming, the choices are spot on.

Of particular note is **Dori Brown's** excellent lighting, one that captures the subtle differences of country, city, and jungle through colors and dappling gobos. Special mention also goes to Vaquero's performance as Crab the dog. He is well behaved, adorable, and offers just the right amount of drool in each scene.

While there are some points of unbalance in the performances, these are not detrimental to the whole. This is a great chance to see one of Shakespeare's early efforts in a setting that absolutely enhances the script it supports.