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# Identity Crisis and Gender Norms in *Was ihr wollt*

Jan Aulitzky

Comedy meets tragedy, or the other way round? As part of the course “PS British and/or Postcolonial Literature: Twelfth Night – Page, Stage, Screen” at the University of Innsbruck, we had the pleasure of attending a performance of William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. Staged at the Kammerspiele of the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck, this production captured spectators with its queer adaptation of the early modern text. In *Was ihr wollt*, which is directed by Anne Mulleners and influenced by texts of Paul B. Preciado and Mae Schwinghammer, gender norms and traditional expectations are being successfully undermined.

At the beginning of the play, before the actual story unfolds, Viola (tremendously played by Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) has an intimate monologue with Sebastian, her alter ego, about their struggles with self-identification and which “role” to play in society. Sebastian and Viola are both fused within Viola, which showcases her/their identity struggle. The monologue, a text sequence from Preciado, deals with the wish to exist on Uranus, a metaphor for a place where Viola finally can be her true self. This scene sets the tone for the entire production with recurring themes such as self-discovery, raging love, unfulfilled desires, and transformations.



Sara Nunius, Pasquale di Filippo, Florian Granzner, Petra Alexandra Pippan, Ulrike Lasta (Maria), Stefan Riedl, Julia Posch, Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler.  
Photo by Birgit Gufler

After Viola's arrival, Maria (played by Ulrike Lasta) introduces the characters and their general attributes, which is an excellent stylistic choice to provide the audience with just enough information to be able to follow the

fast-paced events on stage. Besides the overall modern take on the

intriguing love triangles, music played a major role throughout the entire production. A variety of musical genres have been included such as pop, austropop, techno, and last but not least German Folk music. This added not only another comedic layer but also an often-unexpected twist to the action on stage.

The aspect that stood out the most for me is the subtle but very specific use of thought-provoking sub-meanings in a seemingly funny scene. For example, the foolery of Malvolia (played by Sara Nunius), as hilarious as it might have looked in the first place, takes a quite drastic and dark turn when Sir Toby (played by Stefan Riedl) violently drags her off the stage and imprisons her in an asylum-like room due to



*Pasquale di Filippo, Sara Nunius (Malvolia), Petra Alexandra Pippan. Photo by Birgit Gufler*

her “mental illness” – her sexuality. In this scene the one-sided homosexual desire between Malvolia and Olivia, both played by two extremely talented actresses (Sara Nunius and Julia Posch), is being displayed. This showcases just one aspect of how seemingly comedic or amusing elements had deeper meanings embedded and were used to convey a thought-provoking idea. Therefore, the small space of the Kammerspiele appears to be a perfect match for this very intimate production. It creates a bond between the audience and the actors on stage which grows stronger with each act that passes.

Challenging, fun, and worth it are the three characteristics that in my opinion sum up this production the most. Even though the focus lies on the struggles of transitioning, *Was ihr wollt* displays a broad range of personal issues a lot of us might face in real life, which makes it so much more relatable for us nowadays.

# Review of *Was Ihr Wollt*: A Familiar Story Surprising with Every Line

Martin Bauer

I had the pleasure of attending a performance of *Was Ihr Wollt* as part of a Proseminar at the University of Innsbruck. The experience itself was mesmerising and the production effortlessly managed to combine the traditional comedic template of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with modern themes, such as the search for one's sexual identity, while refraining from provoking the audience and forcing said modern themes into the audience's faces.

The cast of the play manages to deliver a memorable performance that was both emotionally charged and surprisingly nuanced in its delivery. Although each of the actors' performances was very good, the depiction of Viola (formerly Sebastian) was absolutely stellar. Filling the shoes of two characters is a task that takes dedication to the art of acting. This is masterfully executed by Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler who manages to fuse two personalities into one. In terms of direction, I found the piece to be very nuanced. Anne Mulleners managed to rewrite this classic piece and sow a very modern but well-fitting gown for this classic Shakespearean play. As part of the rewriting process Mulleners cut out a substantial amount of the template. This modernises the play and makes its length more enjoyable. The play is set in a fish factory. What sounds off-putting on first glance was visually very interesting. I personally find this choice of setting in large parts due to its artificiality strangely appealing; yet, I also understand that it will not float everyone's boat.

Vibeke Andersen's set design combines the clean, almost clinical nature of the fish factory with Chani Lehmann's clean and artificial costumes. The characters mainly wear utilitarian clothing consisting of artificial materials like rubber and plastic or, in Orsino's case, shiny plastic specs. This artificiality is reflected in the design of the stage and props. The team does not refrain from making very bold choices in terms of props and costumes. From giant walking sea stars to Super Soaker water guns, everything seems to be allowed. I liked that very much mainly because water guns and bright sea stars are not the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks about theatre. The sound music and lightning were equally bold. Especially the beginning, which showed a projection of Sebastian while Viola was walking down the auditorium, interacting with the projection, was mesmerizing. This was not the only surprise that the play had in its quiver. It also integrated contemporary music, for example German folk by Wolfgang Petry. The songs often took the audience by surprise and added to the positively wired ambiance of the play. The production successfully engaged the audience from the very beginning. Moments of humour were well-timed, eliciting laughter from the audience, while the more poignant scenes left a profound impact on the audience

In conclusion, *Was Ihr Wollt* is a must-see for theatre enthusiasts and casual viewers alike. The combination of stellar performances, creative direction, and meticulous attention to detail results in a production that lingers in the mind long after the final curtain falls. I congratulate the entire cast and crew for delivering a truly exceptional theatrical experience.



Picture 1: An example of positive weirdness during one of the folk music integrations. Pasquale di Filippo, Sara Nunius (Malvolia), Petra Alexandra Pippan, Photo by: Birgit Gufler

# Review of *Was Ihr Wollt*: An Old Piece Set in Modern Times or the Recognition of Progress

Nikolaus Fedorcio

The Tiroler Landestheater attempts a bold, new production and despite the sincerity of the addressed topics, does not hold back on humour.



*Caught in a Tangle of Emotion: Viola/Cesario (Tommy Fischner-Wachtler, left) and Olivia (Julia Posch) in a Poignant Moment of Inner Conflict.*

© Birgit Gufler

creative leap by merging Viola with her twin brother, transforming her into a single character grappling with internal conflicts about her identity. This twist not only refreshes the story but also adds a layer of depth to Viola's character. Tommy Fischner-Wachtler's portrayal of Viola is nothing short of mesmerizing. He captures the character's confusion, joy, sadness, love, anger, and more with such authenticity, blurring the line between actor and script.

In addition to the mesmerizing portrayal of Viola, the whole cast in this innovative production of *Twelfth Night* deliver performances that are equally commendable. Julia Posch's interpretation of Olivia is most adequate. She brings a depth and vitality to the character, capturing the nuances of Olivia's emotional journey with ceasing grace and ever rising authenticity. Sara Nunius, in the role of Malvolia—a clever gender-swapped version of Malvolio—adds a refreshing twist to the play. Her portrayal is not only compelling but also significant for its inclusion of another minority sexuality, enriching the narrative with further layers of contemporary relevance. An only Italian speaking Orsino

In the daring new production of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* at the Landestheater, director Anne Mulleners and her team have boldly reimagined a classic, intertwining it with contemporary themes of gender identity and sexual orientation. This reinterpretation is not just timely but necessary, as it brings to the forefront a conversation about transsexuality through the lens of a complex and relatable character. In these times, where people often shy away from divisive issues, this play courageously invites a dialogue.

The challenge of engaging an audience diverse in age and sexual orientations is met with remarkable finesse. The actors, under Mulleners' skillful direction, navigate this balancing act with an exceptional blend of sensitivity and boldness, delivering performances that resonate with audiences from all walks of life.

At the heart of this reimagined narrative is Viola, a survivor of a shipwreck, who, in Shakespeare's version of the story, disguises herself as a man, Cesario, to serve Duke Orsino of Illyria. This production, however, takes a

played by Pasquale di Filippo introduces a fascinating language barrier between him and Olivia that adds a tangible obstacle to their communication, deepening the complexity of their relationship and enhancing the comedic aspects of their interactions.

The integration of works like Paul Preciado's *An Apartment on Uranus* and texts from Mae Schwinghammer further challenges and engages the audience, especially those well-versed in Shakespeare. These additions enrich the script with modern narratives of gender and identity, creating a rich tapestry of themes provoking thought and debate.

Setting of the play in a fish factory is an intriguing choice that not only pays homage to the nautical elements of the original story but also subtly nods to the themes of gender fluidity, drawing an analogy with merpeople. This unconventional backdrop provides a stark contrast to the regal settings typical of Shakespearean plays, offering a fresh perspective, while also being maybe a bit too avant-garde for some, potentially raising more questions than it answers.

With this new production of *Twelfth Night* the Landestheater shows courage and the will to push innovative ventures questioning boundaries and inviting audiences to engage with complex themes of identity and love in a world that often prefers simplicity over complexity. With compelling performances and bold directing, the reinterpretation of the setting and script is thought-provoking and entertaining as well as educating and inspiring, making it a must-see for both Shakespeare enthusiasts and newcomers alike.



# *Was ihr wollt* Is What We Need

Martin Galgoczy

There are no two ways about it - *Was ihr wollt* is as close to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* as Uranus is to Earth, but that is not to its detriment. The play is, in an ultimate meta-understanding of the themes of the original, a transformative experience. Shakespeare's work stops being art that is reproduced and instead becomes a vessel through which a tale both modern and timeless is told.

Framed by excerpts from the works of Paul B. Preciado and Maë Schwinghammer, this interpretation penned by Anne Mullener substitutes some of the original's foolery with a modern exploration of the self; a juxtaposition that steers the mood away from being a comedy of mistaken identity towards musings on queer identity. That is not to say the piece is without humor – at its heart, it is still fine comedy. But it is thoughtful comedy that invites the viewer to think; to take home not only two hours of mirth but also a question or two that deserve to be asked.



The (sea) star of the show, Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler as Viola. Photo by Birgit Gufler.

Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler embodies our main character in a feast for eyes and ears alike but does not dominate or overshadow those he shares the stage with. The takes on all the play's characters are

a lovely blend of fresh and familiar; well-acted and exquisitely costumed. Though the list of roles was truncated compared to Shakespeare's play, it manages to remain cohesive and well-rounded. The play presents itself in a multilingual manner; several lines delivered by Pasquale de Filippo's Orsino are in Italian, who at other times throughout the play speaks German. If there is a deeper meaning to the when, how, and why his lines shift to Italian, it is well-hidden. Thankfully, the supertitles were not.

The rest of the cast also gets to shine in speech, song, and dance. Much like in classic performances that came before, music is used at key moments of the play in a mix of both original pieces written for the play as well as more famous, well-known songs. If music be the food of love, thine chef be Wolfgang Petry tonight. It works for the play – especially when the actors get riff on and work with the original pieces. Sara Nunius' forklift scene elevates Malvolia in every way of the word.

If there was one piece of advice or word of caution to give to the powers that be behind the play, it would be about the referential humor injected into the play. While joking about the wiles of famous royals of 2023 may garner the odd bit of revelry from the audience that sees the play in 2023, it dates the writing in complicated and unfavorable ways. Contemporary reference is the mortal enemy of a timeless classic and *Was ihr wollt* is already an exquisite interpretation that feels timeless in its own way.

# Queerness Meets Shakespeare: Review of *Was ihr wollt*

Annabell Gapp

Shakespeare transferred into a fish factory, Sebastian and Viola/Cesario combined into one person, modern music, and much more characterize the production of *Was ihr wollt* at the Tiroler Landestheater. As part of the course 'Twelfth Night – Page, Stage, Screen' at the University of Innsbruck we attended a performance of the 2023 production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* at the Tiroler Landestheater. The (mostly) German version of Shakespeare's play entitled *Was ihr wollt* is directed by Anne Mulleners and complemented by texts by Paul B. Preciado and Maë Schwinghammer. Why mostly German? Orsino (Pasquale di Filippo) talks primarily in Italian supported by German supertitles. For this reason, Cesario occasionally responds in Italian.

After a dream-like monologue of the main character Viola, she is stranded in Illyria. Maria introduces all the characters living in Illyria to her. It is rather unusual for a play performed at a theater to provide an introduction and backstories to each character. Nevertheless, this makes it easier for spectators to find their feet because the production might be rather confusing as a lot of actors perform multiple characters.



Maria (Ulrika Lasta) introducing the characters. © Birgit Gufler

Mulleners brings a lot of contemporary elements to the early-modern play. While in Shakespeare's time the cast was by convention only male, in the Innsbruck production women embody men, and vice versa. For example, Malvolio becomes Malvolia played by Sara Nunius. Even though Malvolia is a woman, she's not very feminine. Additionally, she desires Lady Olivia – and the production explores homosexual desire and the play's queer potential in many ways. Another example of this cross-casting would be Petra Alexandra Pippan playing both Antonio and the Fool. Later in the play it turns out that the Fool is performed by the disguised Antonio. However, Viola is still portrayed by a male actor: Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler.

Is it Viola, though? In the opening scene Sebastian (in Shakespeare's version Viola's twin brother) reflects on his dream about being on Uranus, feeling like a fish out of water in his own body. He seems to be neither comfortable being a man nor comfortable being a woman. Therefore, Uranus could be a metaphor for the world of queerness. Sebastian morphs into Viola – they are the same person in this production – and then dresses up as Cesario like in Shakespeare's version. Later in the play Antonio addresses Sebastian by his name. While we all know that Sebastian is not the Sebastian known by

Antonio, Antonio does not seem to realize that. The experiment of turning two characters into one offers an approach to exploring the play's queerness.

I would like to point out another modern element: the music. It ranged from Harry Styles to German



*The cast dancing to the modern music. © Birgit Gufler*

folk music to funky beats. There is definitely something for every generation. These songs address different types of audiences and therefore open the play to a variety of spectators. Combined with different dances and movements the music also added another comedic aspect to the play.

The interaction between actors and audience is noteworthy as well. With the play being performed in the small and more intimate space of the *Kammerspiele*, the characters are quite literally approachable. The actors are wandering through the rows, even sitting down on free seats. Sometimes they directly address the audience during their monologues or make a joke intended for the audience only. There is a part where Olivia (Julia Posch) walks along the seats and asks spectators something directly although I was not sure if she wanted a response or not. This lively interaction makes the play approachable and gives the audience a feeling of participation and involvement.

In my opinion this production is definitely worth watching. If you are looking for a fun but also meaningful evening, consider attending *Was ihr wollt* at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck.

# A Queer Perspective on Shakespeare: Review of *Was Ihr Wollt*

Nora Haselrieder

The production of *Was Ihr Wollt* at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck was a dazzling show filled with colourful light, music and fun. The production merged Shakespeare's play with the work of queer theorist Paul B. Preciado's *An Apartment on Uranus*, creating a new play that highlighted both texts in a unique way and touched on modern themes of queerness, otherness and gender struggles.

Anne Mulleners' production wowed the audience with beautiful costumes in blues, purple and greens created by Chani Lehmann that highlighted individual characters through the use of different fabrics, textures and interesting silhouettes, while also creating a harmony between them. The stage set designed by Vibeke Andersen was modelled after a fish factory and simple on first glance yet complex in its application. An interesting feature of the stage was the small hut which was built on the left of the stage and had a door as well as a window with shades behind which the administrative work of the fish factory took place, although the characters used it as a hiding space more often than not. Another smart feature of the stage was the use of multiple entry points from which the characters appeared: Viola and Antonio first appeared from the audience, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew mostly entered from the left of the stage, Orsino always used the elevator doors built to the left and Olivia often appeared through the semi-transparent plastic curtains that were hung up to the right side of the stage.

Shifts in mood and the development of the story was enhanced through a clever use of lighting instead of drastic changes to the stage set. It started out very in a sombre green-blue, was characterised by bright purple and pink colours during the height of the confusion, and returned to its green-blue tint as the play reached its conclusion.

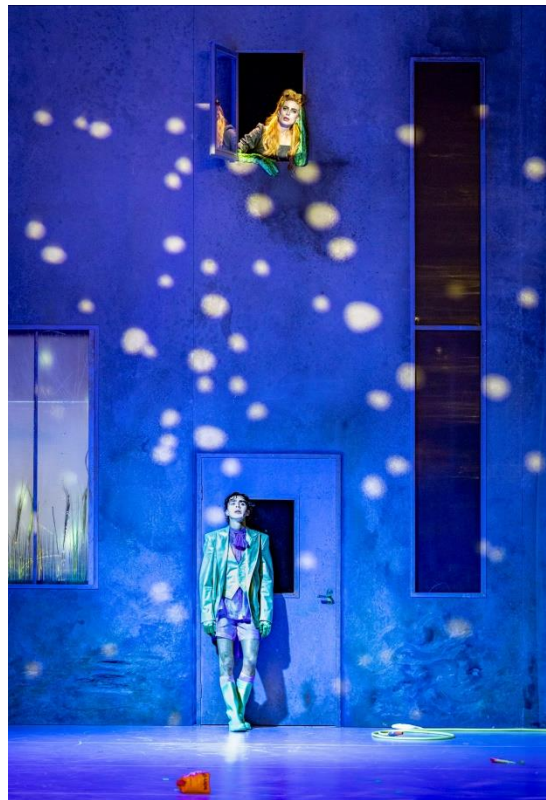
The production was highly symbolic and covered the currently highly discussed topic of gender identity, highlighting also the queer potential of Shakespeare's play. While Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is more humorous in nature – with Feste the Fool being a recurring character throughout both the main story and the subplot – it proposes a heteronormative ending as Olivia marries Sebastian, Viola's male brother, and Viola returns to the life as a woman in her marriage to Orsino. The Innsbruck production embraced the topic of queerness more explicitly and delivered a thought-provoking ending called forth by the merging of Sebastian and Viola into one character, which does not allow for a resolution of the love triangle and leads to a more tragic ending that highlights once again the social message behind the performance and the Identity struggles of the main character which actor Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler skilfully portrayed.

Olivia (Julia Posch) was another well-portrayed character in the play, and I quite enjoyed her more proactive approach in the Innsbruck production. Her more demanding and outgoing personality fit well with the modern reinterpretation of the play and gave the character more agency.

It was an interesting character choice as well to combine Feste the Fool and Antonio – Sebastian's companion – into one character. This resulted in the loss of some of the humour in

the play in my eyes, but created a further level of intrigue within the production and Viola/Cesario's identity struggles by adding someone who knows their identity before they stepped on land into the mix.

To conclude, I enjoyed the Innsbruck production. The queer re-reading of the play tackled the struggles of what it means to be queer and different while creating a magical atmosphere and showing the many ways in which Shakespeare's work can be understood.



Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler)  
and Olivia (Julia Posch). Photo by  
Birgit Gufler

# *Was ihr wollt*: A Daring Theatrical Odyssey of Identity, Music, and Modernity at the Tiroler Landestheater

Katharina Huber-Rieser

As part of the seminar *British and/or Postcolonial Literature: Twelfth Night: Page, Stage, Screen*, we recently attended a performance of the 2023 production of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* at the Tiroler Landestheater, which depicts the story of Viola, who, after surviving a shipwreck, disguises herself as a young man named Cesario and becomes entangled in a web of mistaken identities, unrequited love and comedic misunderstandings. In a daring departure from convention, the Innsbruck production of Shakespeare's play not only added a captivating and modern twist through an eclectic mix of contemporary music and unconventional costumes but also redefined the narrative itself. A significant aspect of this daring departure involves rewriting the characters, with Viola and Sebastian sharing the same identity. This unique reinterpretation of the characters becomes a crucial part of the production's innovative approach, challenging conventional norms and adding depth to the exploration of identity within the narrative.

While this theatrical interpretation, without a doubt, deviates from the traditional expectations an audience might have of Shakespearean theatre, the use of what seemed to be a thrust stage, reminiscent of the Globe Theatre, nevertheless, added a layer of authenticity to the production. Throughout the performance, actors and actresses communicated directly with the audience and this direct interaction transformed the theatrical experience into a shared journey, enhancing a sense of inclusivity.

The aquatic setting initially raised some questions but ultimately added layers of symbolism to the play and definitely offered food for thought. Since the characters in *Twelfth Night* undergo various transformations, the aquatic setting was used to emphasize this transformative quality. Moreover, water's reflective properties can highlight the theme of disguise and deception. Characters often adopt disguises in the play, and the water's surface can serve as a symbolic mirror, emphasizing the idea that appearances can be deceiving.

One of the standout elements of the production is the integration of songs by Harry Styles, which undoubtedly resonates with the younger audience members. The pulsating beats and relatable lyrics provide a contemporary backdrop that brings Shakespeare's timeless story into the 21st century. However, the choice of contemporary music, specifically from Harry Styles, does introduce an

interesting dichotomy within the audience. While the younger generation finds themselves immersed in the familiarity and excitement of the modern tunes, some older attendees may feel a certain disconnect. The preferences of older spectators, who may have been more attuned to traditional interpretations of Shakespeare, might not align with the modernized musical choices. The clash between the expected and the contemporary is not limited to the musical choices but extends to the visual realm through unconventional, yet vibrant and modern costumes. The photograph on the right perfectly captures how the costume designer Chani Lehmann managed to mirror the idea of the aquatic setting in the attire of the actors and actresses.



*Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler  
(Viola) (c) Birgit Gufler*

Yet another interesting element of the production was the transformation of Malvolio into Malvolia (Sara Nunius), which allowed for an exploration of gender identity and sexuality.

Cross-casting Antonio (Petra Alexandra Pippan) and the Fool as women and having Antonio disguise as the Fool may accentuate the exploration of same-sex relationships, providing a contemporary lens through which to examine themes of love, desire, and societal acceptance. This blending of characters can symbolize the transformative power of theatre itself, where individuals can explore and embrace different facets of their identities. However, as earlier mentioned it's important to note that the exploration of identity and relationships is not solely confined to the gender-related changes in the production. Viola and Sebastian (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler), portrayed as the same figure in this rendition, add a crucial dimension to the narrative. This revelation, which challenges traditional character dynamics, enriches the thematic exploration, highlighting the complexity of identity in the play.

In conclusion, the immersive approach, combined with the modern musical choices and vibrant costumes, and particularly the emphasis on the complexity of identity cements the production as a theatrical odyssey that successfully bridges the past and the present, creating a truly unforgettable experience for all who embark on this journey.



# Shakespeare on a Gender Bender: The Psychedelic Fever Dream of the Tiroler Landestheater's *Twelfth Night*

Katharina Isser

The production of *Twelfth Night* (German: *Was ihr wollt*) at the Tiroler Landestheater aptly starts out with Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) outlining a dream that they had. And a dream it is: Flashing, vivid colors; holograms; techno music; dancing starfish extras; and outlandish plastic costumes (Chani Lehmann), including a mermaid tail, water wings and a sushi-stuffed body suit, turn this production into a nightly hallucination. Set somewhere between an underwater world reminiscent of *Barbie's Mermaidia*, a brutalist fish factory, and the planet Uranus, director Anne Mulleners's *Twelfth Night* is literally and figuratively all over the place.



***On a stage drowning in blue, some characters use water wings or rubber boots to keep themselves afloat. ©Birgit Gufler / Tiroler Landestheater***

The production deviates considerably from Shakespeare's original text. Excerpts from Paul B. Preciado's *An Apartment on Uranus*, a collection of personal reflections on gender

transcendence, supplement the play, while other parts of the original dramatic text are cut or changed. Malvolio turns into the female Malvolia (Sara Nunius), while Feste and Antonio keep their male gender within the play but are played by one and the same female actress (Petra Alexandra Pippan). The figure of Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, has disappeared as a character in his own right and instead been incorporated into a genderless Viola, though it is not made clear whether he is their former self, a part of their soul, or a fantasy from their dreams.

Beneath all the loud, neon distractions, the production does succeed in exploring what it means for the otherworldly Viola – who seems to simultaneously come from Uranus and Atlantis – to have to conform to one form, one gender, to fit into binary human society and the gendered roles that the other characters ascribe to them. That transition is marked by their shedding their mermaid tail in the beginning and taking on a human form. This might mirror what it means for a transgender person to go through a medical transition, changing and removing parts of their body to conform to society's ideas of gender-sex-correspondence.



***Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) is portrayed as an otherworldly mermaid creature in search of their identity. © Birgit Gufler / Tiroler Landestheater***

Unfortunately, the nuances of this exploration are somewhat lost next to other plotlines and flashy scenes devoid of any real content. Changes and omissions from the original plot, regular

dance intermissions, and surreal elements in set and costume design make the narrative hard to follow and distract from the core message. This is a shame, because the idea of making Sebastian and Viola two people – two genders – trapped in one body has tremendous potential that is only partially lived up to. Nevertheless, Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler’s portrayal of Viola/Sebastian/Cesario is phenomenal, both strong and incredibly tender, and makes the play worth seeing despite its general lack of focus.

The Tiroler Landestheater’s *Twelfth Night* is entertaining and engaging throughout, and there is never a dull moment in the play. But it is fragmented, hectic, and confused about its tone – rapidly oscillating between the hilarious, the tragic, and the truly appalling. It simultaneously does too much and too little: The themes which matter drown in the muddle of all the other subplots and events, which often add little substance.



***Malvolia (Sara Nunius) gives a performance in her yellow stockings. © Birgit Gufler / Tiroler Landestheater***

For such a Uranus-blessed mess, this reviewer awards three out of five holographic, dancing starfish. ★★☆☆☆

# *Was ihr wollt*: A Dazzling Odyssey Through Gender Fluidity, Mermaid Realms, and Contemporary Revelry

Emilia Kaserer

In the vibrant and eccentric rendition of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (*Was ihr wollt*) at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck, director Anne Mulleners invites the audience to dive into a world where everything flows – a world of gender fluidity, love, and self-discovery set against the backdrop of a fish factory.



Cesario/Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachter) and Olivia (Julia Posch). Photo by Birgit Gufler

The love triangle involving the wealthy Orsino (Pasquale di Filippo), the energetic Olivia (Julia Posch), and the gender-fluid Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) unfolds amidst a hilarious web of misunderstandings. Orsino's vehemently Italian dialogues amplify the comedic chaos, with Olivia unable to grasp his words and Viola/Cesario stepping in as the humorous translator. Sir Toby (Stefan Riedl) and Sir Andrew von Bleichenwang (Florian Granzner) further add comedic brilliance to the narrative with their creative antics, infusing the play with laughter and creativity. The entire story unfolds within the confines of a fish factory serving as a symbolic seascape, representing a sea of limitless possibilities and creating a whimsical atmosphere that complements the play's quirky nature. Chani Lehmann's costumes, ranging from pastel lilac to seafoam green, evoke a mermaid aesthetic, enhancing the visual spectacle that seamlessly integrates with the play's overarching theme.

Despite the hefty undertones of humor and love, the concept of fluidity takes center stage in *Was ihr wollt*, both metaphorically and visually. This production goes beyond conventional storytelling by portraying Viola and Sebastian not as separate entities but as the same, underscoring the interconnectedness of their characters and defying traditional identity norms. Viola's journey, navigating seamlessly between masculine and feminine roles, challenges the rigid boundaries of gender, culminating in her proclamation of her true mermaid identity that transcends conventional labels. The metaphor of standing at a crossroads, where opposing riverbanks are replaced by a unified

junction, resonates as a powerful statement about identity and the fluidity of existence as Viola declares herself beyond the binary of genders. The play's exploration of fluidity extends beyond gender, encompassing the entire spectrum of human experience, echoing the notion that, like the ever-changing tides, identities can ebb and flow in a constant state of transformation. This dynamic interpretation, embedded in every aspect of the production, celebrates the beauty and complexity of embracing the fluid nature of existence.

In summary, *Was ihr wollt* at the Tiroler Landestheater is a dazzling and thought-provoking exploration of love, identity, and self-discovery. Anne Mulleners' bold reinterpretation of Shakespeare, coupled with inventive stage design and a dynamic ensemble, creates a theatrical experience that captivates the audience while pushing the boundaries of traditional dramatic storytelling. This production successfully captivates a younger and more diverse audience and stands as a testament to the transformative power of theatre in challenging societal norms and celebrating the richness of diverse narratives.

## Review of *Was ihr wollt*

Franziska König

Imagine Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with a modern twist – that's exactly what Anne Mulleners's version delivers. It's Shakespeare, but not as you might know it – the modern touch gives the old story a fresh and energetic vibe. In the course "British and/or Postcolonial Literature: *Twelfth Night* – Page, Stage, Screen", we had the chance to watch the German version of Shakespeare's play *Was ihr wollt* on Thursday, November 16<sup>th</sup> at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck.



the cast - © Birgit Gufler

The first aspect that comes to my mind when I think about the production is its extraordinary stage design (Vibeke Andersen) and the outstanding costumes (Chani Lehmann). It is set in a fish factory, representing the transition between water and land. This theme was carried through from the first to the last second of the play, starting with the portrayal of Viola as a mermaid at the beginning and continuing with various theme-related costumes like Sir Andrew's water wings or Sir Toby's flippers and the use of starfish as supporting characters.

Probably the biggest difference to Shakespeare's version is the absence of the character of Sebastian. In Anne Mulleners's production, Sebastian and Viola are played by one actor – Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler, indicating that the main plot revolves around the identity crisis of one single person. Viola describes herself as "multiple" – born as a boy, but feeling neither male nor female. This is probably the reason why Viola first appeared as a mermaid, establishing a connection to popular culture, as mermaids cannot be assigned a single gender either.



Viola (Tommy Fishnaller) as a mermaid – © Birgit Gufler

While only male actors were allowed to play in Shakespeare's time, this modern version features many female actresses. Some of the male characters were even played by women – for instance, Antonio was played by Petra Alexandra Pippan. The originally male character Malvolio was even changed to the female "Malvolia", played by Sara Nunius.

Another aspect which makes this version unique is the use of modern music. Ranging from funky beats via German folk music to internationally known songs by Harry Styles, the music – chosen by Hansjörg Sofka – gives the play a modern touch.

The fact that some parts of the production – mainly Orsino's text – were in Italian was extremely confusing to me in the beginning of the performance and it took me a while to

notice that there were supertitles. However, it was remarkable how easy it was to follow the play even without reading every single word of Orsino's lines.

To sum up, I can only recommend watching Anna Mulleners's production of *Was ihr wollt*. The performance includes elements of drama, humour and emotion, all with a modern touch, making it a remarkable experience for all viewers.



*Maria (Ulrike Lasta) introducing the characters at the beginning of the play – © Birgit Gufler*

# *Was Ihr Wollt: A Modern Interpretation of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night*

Ersin Korkmaz



Viola courting Olivia on behalf of Orsino, Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) and Oliva (Julia Posch), Photo by Birgit Gufler

Based on William Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night* and integrating excerpts from *An Apartment on Uranus* by queer theorist Paul B. Preciado, the Innsbruck Production *Was Ihr Wollt*, directed by Anne



Mulleners, is a humorous and fun interpretation of Shakespeare's drama. The story is mostly unchanged, yet, some slight alterations, like the shortening of dialogues and the reordering of scenes are made. For example, Orsino's (Pasquale di Filippo) monologue from the first act is postponed into the second act. Additionally, a focus on identity is masterfully intertwined into Shakespeare's original play, in which cross-dressing was very important to the plot.

Although the play is still set in Illyria, the main location of the play is a fish factory. Based on this, many of the elements used in the play, like costumes (designed by Chani Lehmann) and props (selected by Andreas Vollgruber), are also inspired by the sea and fish. Vibeke Andersen's well-designed stage also features a building that represents Olivia's (Julia Posch) castle. It can be argued that the new location of a fish factory is not just a stylistic choice, but rather another brilliant way to illustrate the ideas of gender and identity that are pursued by this adaptation, as the gender of the processed fish is no longer of interest.

The source of this idea is *An Apartment on Uranus*, where Paul Preciado, formerly Beatriz Preciado (transitioned in 2015), dreams of an apartment on Uranus. Here he can live as an uranist, bypassing the modern taxonomies of race, gender, class, or disability. On Uranus, identity is not defined by gender, or race.

The play starts with a short recitation of a segment from *An Apartment on Uranus*. The introduction is then used to establish an interesting plot device that is used in this adaptation; the actor of Viola, Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler, also embodies Sebastian. This is because Sebastian has transitioned into Viola, and now confronts herself. In a few scenes, where the appearance of both characters is required, technological solutions like the projection of a video are used.

The humour used in this adaptation of *Twelfth Night* can sometimes be a bit too quirky, however, it mostly is self-aware of this fact and sometimes illustrates this with witty jokes. In a scene, an excerpt from another play of Shakespeare is used during a dialogue, which is later used in a witty joke, about it also being from him.

All in all, *Was ihr Wollt* is a modern, fun, and humorous, albeit sometimes a bit too quirky, retelling of Shakespeare's original story *Twelfth Night*. It manages to retell the story in a very appealing way. Additionally, a very thought-provoking view on identity, referencing Preciado's *An Apartment on Uranus* is beautifully inserted into Shakespeare's drama.

## Serious Fishing: Review of *Was Ihr Wollt*

François Lallemand

Anne Mulleners's *Was Ihr Wollt*, performed at the Kammerspiele at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck takes the audience on a trip into a queer exploration of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Extracts from Maë Schwinghammer and from Paul B. Preciado's essay *An Apartment on Uranus* lead the audience through an interrogation of various aspects of gender identity and integrates flawlessly into the performance of *Was Ihr Wollt*. The opening depicts a merger of Sebastian and his twin sister Viola. On the stage, there is a projection of Sebastian, played by Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler. The actor then approaches the stage walking through the auditorium. Techniques such as these were explored by bands like Gorillaz and fits well with the theme of music that dominates the play, as well as enhances the production's focus on gender norms. Integrating the texts by Schwinghammer and Preciado, the production creates a dream-like scenery and carries the audience through scenes of cold colours, dance, and song.

Interestingly, the experience of an exploration of the different texts is complemented by a mixture of musical styles – including bass, new wave tracks, pop, rock, RnB, Indie, and ballads. The music constitutes an integral part for the performance as the audience watches the actors dance together to different songs. The usage of lights (Michael Reinisch), language, curtains, and a variety of costumes (Chani Lehmann), each adding to the uniqueness of the different scenes, transforms the play into a genre- and gender-crossing contemporary experience of one of Shakespeare's more 'serious' comedies.

While the cast was cut short of not only one but two characters, these characters were still found on stage. Antonio was played by Petra Alexandra Pippan who also performed the role of the jester Feste. The production was in a fish factory, where Olivia lives on one of the upper floors. Feste was heard singing and seen throwing fish at the residence of the noble Olivia.

Furthermore, the production used an interesting range of props. Instead of a ring, which was initially Olivia's scheme to call Viola back to Olivia's residence, it was a painting of a white horse with a rider on its back that was supposed to initiate the return of the main character in Mulleners's *Was Ihr Wollt*. While it was not the only prop that was exchanged for a different object, it was the one that stuck out the most. For example, the swords that Antonio and Andrew use in Shakespeare's text to battle each other are replaced with water pistols in *Was Ihr Wollt*. While these props seemed to fit the rather modern stage design, the painting had a renaissance style and was aesthetically different than the rest of the stage, littered with fishing nets, ropes and actors in their costumes.



Florian Granzner, struggling as Sir Andrew with netting.

Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler, Ulrike Lasta, Florian Granzner, Julia Posch, Pasquale di Filippo, Stefan Riedl, Petra Alexandra Pippan, performing one of the many dance choreographies.

While the production was not lacking any of the comedic elements that makes an audience laugh, and relate to the characters on stage, the enactment of Shakespeare's *Was Ihr Wollt* highlighted many of the tragic elements of the play and made the experience a highly emotional one.

## Experience a Modern Twist on *Twelfth Night*: Review of *Was Ihr Wollt*

Yasmin Piger

If you are drawn to the aura of Harry Styles and the charm of extravagant costumes (designed by Chani Lehmann), then Anne Mulleners's production of *Was Ihr Wollt* at the Kammerspiele of the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck is an absolute must-see.

The play unfolds with a fast pace as gender attributions dissolve and identities become blurred. It opens with an emotional journey as Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) searches for her identity. In contrast to Shakespeare's version, Anne Mulleners chose to turn Sebastian and Viola into one character. Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler delivers a dazzling performance and skillfully changes subtle character traits to switch between different identities. Viola disguised as the messenger Cesario becomes the center of romantic chaos at the snobby Duke Orsino's (Pasquale di Filippo) court. Viola falls in love with Orsino, who in turn is infatuated with Countess Olivia, who is not flattered by his feelings. The use of three languages with subtitles highlights a linguistic barrier as Orsino speaks only Italian and Olivia German. Therefore, this adds complexity to the story and emphasizes the conflict and disharmony between the two and the need for Cesario as their translator.

The setting is a dark fish factory where the underwater world and the mainland collide. Mulleners's production immerses the audience in a world populated by sea creatures. The allusions to pop culture, especially the gender-neutral mermaids, give the classic Shakespearean play a contemporary twist.

The characters often show their inner desires and feelings with the help of dance and music, creating an enjoyable and immersive experience. The choice of fishing clothes, shades of blue, rubber boots and human-sized starfish give the piece a playful and comical feeling, while the grey walls emphasize the characters' inner conflicts. *Was Ihr Wollt* fearlessly challenges conventional gender norms. Through the cross-dressing of Malvolia and Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler playing both Viola and Sebastian, gender stereotypes are shattered, making everyone feel represented in this narrative. The play addresses different types of romance, challenges societal norms and encourages the audience to question the need for rigid gender and social norms.

In essence, *Was Ihr Wollt* goes beyond its comedic surface and encourages to reflect on the search for identity and the freedom to love beyond societal expectations. Anne Mulleners's production is not just a play, but a journey that inspires reflection, challenging preconceptions and celebrating the beauty of love and individuality. Don't miss the chance to be captivated by this humorous and transformative performance.



Malvolia (Sara Nunius) is confessing her love, Stars (Pasquale di Filippo and Petra Alexandra Pippan).  
Photo by Birgit Gufler.

# Queering Shakespeare: *Was Ihr Wollt* at Tiroler Landestheater

Jakob Reitzenstein

Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler's remarkable portrayal of both Viola and Sebastian in William Shakespeare's *Was ihr wollt* at Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck takes center stage, offering a fresh perspective on gender fluidity. In this adaptation, Viola, originally born as Sebastian,



Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) as a mermaid. Photo by Birgit Gufler.

embarks on a journey of self-discovery, ultimately embracing her female identity.

The play begins with an intriguing scene in which Sebastian/Viola dons a mermaid suit, symbolizing the fluidity of gender as the character transitions between male and female identities, much like a mermaid navigating both land and sea. The play successfully substitutes the external confusion of the protagonist's identity into an internal conflict through this approach.

In Anne Mulleners' adaptation, Viola's transformation from a society-defined male to embracing her female identity introduces a queerness that adds depth to the story, raising essential questions about identity and social acceptance. The incorporation of texts by queer philosopher Paul B. Preciado and non-binary author Maë Schwinghammer further enriches the narrative, providing a profound exploration of these complex themes.

A striking aspect is how this production confronts the expectations of its predominantly older audience who might more likely desire a fundamental version. *Was ihr wollt* challenges conventional norms, inviting viewers to consider the evolving understanding of gender and identity in contemporary society. Additionally, the stage design in Mullener's adaption differs drastically from the original. The play takes place in a fish factory and the costumes alter accordingly. Be prepared for starfishes and water guns instead of evening gowns.

One standout scene that lingers in my memory is the intense confrontation between Orsino (Pasquale di Filippo) and Olivia (Julia Posch) over Viola/Sebastian. As they tugged at Viola/Sebastian's upper and lower body, one of them forcefully ripped Viola/Sebastian's glove off. This powerful moment revealed Viola/Sebastian's dual identity. It instantly evoked a feeling

of surprise and made me think of contemporary gender reveals in which popping balloons spill a color to disclose the child's sex. Of course, the scene in the play had many more layers, as the concept of genderfluidity contrasts the traditional theory of only two existing genders. Hence, showcasing a gender reveal of a genderfluid person feels a bit surreal but is exactly the cognitive stimulation that made me enjoy most parts of the play.

However, it's worth noting that while the slapstick scenes in the first half of the play added comedic pleasure, they became somewhat exhausting in the second half, particularly the chase scenes on stage. This aspect of the production might have benefited from a more balanced approach.

Don't miss this thought-provoking production that transcends the boundaries of traditional gender norms and invites the audience to reflect on the significance of embracing a more inclusive perspective.

# Review of William Shakespeare's *Was Ihr Wollt*

Julian Ringler

I had the pleasure of attending Anne Mulleners' modern interpretation of Shakespeare's classic comedy *Twelfth Night* titled *Was Ihr Wollt* at the Tiroler Landestheater on November 16th. Mulleners' production maintains the Bard's timeless themes of mistaken identity, deception, and the complex nature of love, while updating the setting and characters to resonate with a contemporary audience. In other words, societal attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ relationships and pushing gender boundaries have evolved significantly since the 1600s. Mulleners' production directly brings these themes to the fore in a way we can all relate to.



Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler (Viola), Julia Posch (Olivia). © Birgit Gufler

Mulleners emphasizes the play's exploration of gender roles and sexuality. Her production directly examines issues of gender identity and asks whether people need both female and male aspects to exist in society. She presents Viola and Sebastian in a way that more deeply probes their experience of gender fluidity and expression. This progressive interpretation gave new layers of meaning to the play's examination of how we perform and understand our identities. Furthermore, she implies the characters as having relationships and attractions that transcend traditional gender roles. The fast-paced production kept the play's energy high, and people in the audience interested.

Mulleners' direction was sharp and ensured the classic plot twists landed with maximum comedic effect. The cast brought Shakespeare's colorful characters vibrantly to life, from Pasquale Di Filippo's melodramatic Orsino to Stefan Riedl's uproarious Sir Toby Belch. Sara Nunius was a standout as the repressed and vindictive Malvolia, manipulating her voice and physicality to craft a nuanced portrayal of the character struggling against society's constraints.





*Sara Nunius, Pasquale di Filippo, Florian Granzner, Petra Alexandra Pippan, Ulrike Lasta (Maria), Stefan Riedl, Julia Posch, Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler © Birgit Gufler*

As an English Student of the University of Innsbruck, I found Mulleners' production a fascinating modern lens through which to view Shakespeare's exploration of timeless themes that

remain highly relevant today. Gender, sexuality, and the desire to be free of social expectations are ever-evolving discussions in our society. This production provided so much to discuss in the seminar. I would certainly recommend seeing Mulleners' dynamic interpretation of *Was Ihr Wollt* to any fellow students looking to gain new perspectives on Shakespeare's works.

## Review of *Was Ihr Wollt* at Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck

Hannah-Lena Ripper



Pasquale di Filippo, Sara Nunius (Malvolia), Petra Alexandra Pippan

Photographer: Birgit Gufler

The production of *Was Ihr Wollt* at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck, is a queer re-reading of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Meanwhile the original equally plays with perceptions of sex and gender identity but ultimately leads to a heterosexual conclusion. I watched the play in November as part of a university course on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and think the production puts a unique and sensitive reading to the play.

Quotes from trans writer Paul B. Preciado's *An Apartment on Uranus* and Maë Schwinghammer's *Covids Metarmorphosen* are used. The term *Wolkengeschlechter* (cloud-genders) borrowed from Schwinghammer's text occurs throughout the play and prompts the viewer to scrutinize their views on gender and the gender binary.

The story mostly follows the original with only a few bigger changes which support and enhance the themes pursued by the production, such as combining the characters of Viola and Sebastian (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler). The director Anne Mulleners put the recognition scene between Sebastian and Viola as the very first scene on stage. The scene turns the two characters into one, Viola is listed as Viola formerly Sebastian and Antonio (Petra Alexandra Pippan) calls Viola Sebastian on stage. The scene is mirrored close to the end of the play since it seems to be the key scene of the play.

Antonio who originally saves Sebastian and follows him to Illyria, additionally takes over the role of the fool, previously occupied by a separate character named Feste. He travels to follow Viola who he knows as Sebastian and is currently hiding under the alias of Cesario. Malvolio in this version is called Malvolia (Sarah Nunius) and uses she/her pronouns. Viola and Malvolia are the outliers in the play, both seem in some aspect gender-queer figures, and both are the only ones to wear mermaid-like clothing, which serves to hint at this queerness. There are starfish which seem to function mainly as background actors or comedic relief and are especially prominent with Viola and Malvolia. As a result of the production's shifts with regard to the play's *dramatis personae*, the ending seems a lot more tragic: because Viola and Sebastian are the same person, the misunderstandings that shape the play are not all neatly dissolved, and because the trick played by Maria is not revealed, Malvolia, too, experiences a more tragic ending. The dramaturg Diana Merkel explained in the introduction before the performance that the story was re-imagined as more of a tragedy than a comedy, but the comic elements stand out even more in this tragic re-interpretation, and vice versa.

The production manages to set itself in a more contemporary time but at the same time stays timeless, using old fashioned language mixed with requisites from today's time, reflected in the architecture on stage, like the elevator. I like how the space on the stage was used and Malvolia's little isolated box and Olivia's tower of solitude added literal dimensions to the stage.

The production gives a queer interpretation of the text that feels very authentic. Not everything is pressed neatly into a box and gender is not necessarily fixed for all the characters, just like many trans individuals often need time to figure themselves out before they find a label that fits them or find out that no label exactly fits.

All in all, if you are a fan of Shakespeare who is not afraid of his stories taking a new meaning, I highly recommend this production. Even if you are not acquainted with gender theory this production can make you question the gender binary or your own perceptions toward the concept of gender in general.

# Anne Mulleners' Take on Shakespeare's *Was Ihr Wollt*: Delving into the Realms of Non-Binary and Transgender Perspectives

Alexandra Seiwald

Anne Mulleners' new production of Shakespeare's *Was Ihr Wollt* (original title: *Twelfth Night*), currently enchanting audiences at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck, is assumed to be an attempt to appeal to a younger audience by presenting a diverse exploration and new interpretation of self-discovery regarding gender and identity. Additionally, it incorporates the everlasting themes of love and queerness as well as modern musical elements to resonate with a younger audience. While the fundamental essence of Shakespeare's plot remains the foundation of the play, Mulleners' queer reading of the play unveils innovative adaptations, bringing new life into this classic play.



Figure 1: Viola (Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler) and Olivia (Julia Posch). Photo by Birgit Gufler

Central to this reimagination is the merging of Viola and Sebastian into a single person (portrayed by Tommy Fischnaller-Wachtler), diverging significantly from the original portrayal of twin brother and sister Sebastian and Viola. Viola arrives in Illyria with a non-binary identity, avoiding the confines of conventional gender norms. Despite this revelation, Viola takes on the role of Cesario, as in Shakespeare's original, by presenting herself as a young man to serve Orsino (portrayed by Pasquale di Filippo), who throughout the play turns out to be Viola's love interest. This way of addressing gender and identity doesn't just make the eternal themes of love and identity more visible – it may also be able to help the audience understand the spectrums of non-binary and transgender experiences better. Mulleners' artistic vision extends further to reimagining key characters, by notably blurring the lines between Antonio and Feste (portrayed by Petra Alexandra Pippan), merging them into a single character who protects Viola, and by transforming Malvolio into Malvolia (portrayed by Sara Nunius), embodying a female persona. Here, I'd like to highlight Malvolia's aspiration to wed Olivia (portrayed by Julia Posch), drawing a parallel with contemporary instances of seemingly forbidden love, such as the relationships of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle or Prince Wilhelm and Simon from the series *Young Royals*. This comparison underscores her desire for the freedom to openly

express her love for Olivia, emphasizing the notion that if these modern couples can openly display their affection, Malvolia should also be able to do so.

Aside from changing the characters themselves, Anne Mulleners and Hansjörg Sofka – who was responsible for the production’s music – seem to intend to resonate with a younger audience, as they integrate modern tracks such as Harry Styles’ “Music for a Sushi Restaurant” and Charli XCX’s “Speed Drive” from *Barbie The Album*. Notably, I was impressed by the use of the techno track “Wat Als Niemand Op Mij Wacht” – which is accessible through a QR code in the play's program booklet – by Dutch artist S10 who seems to be relatively unknown in Austria, as it presents an opportunity to showcase lesser-known talents while causing excitement within the audience. Moreover, music serves as a channel for creating a vibrant atmosphere, uplifting the audience’s mood, and enhancing their overall theatrical experience. Mulleners’ fusion of diverse musical genres and unconventional choices underscores the effort to not only modernise Shakespeare but also to create an echoing theatrical journey that resonates with contemporary audiences.

To conclude, Anne Mulleners’ production not only breathes fresh life into a timeless classic but also serves as a platform for thought-provoking discussions around identity, love, and acceptance in today’s society. I, therefore, recommend anyone open to embracing new perspectives to consider attending this production and exploring this new interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Was Ihr Wollt*.