

with considerable authority. "I've read it many times. I've seen quite a few productions. I've been in quite a few productions," he says. "And what I've concluded is, it's a really absurd play."

Hold, what heresy is this? The director calls Shakespeare's comedy absurd, even as his Brass Tacks Ensemble prepares to open the show next Thursday at Performance Network's TreeTown Performance Festival?

Thing is, the term "absurd" isn't necessarily a put-down in Ingagiola's lexicon.

In the same conversation, he also marvels at "Shakespeare's genius in creating 25 characters with 25 different points of view. It's the world. You get to see so many ways of viewing life. It's just amazing, fantastic."

Then perhaps the incongruous twists in the Bard's famed "pastoral" play are quite calculated?

many things that happen in the play) that are just utterly, mind-bogglingly strange. You'll have one *deux ex machina* after another, then all of a sudden, everyone is saved."

Ingagiola is vexed, however, by the play's offstage action.

"Why aren't they showing these things?" he wonders. "It's a very weird play. We suddenly learn that Oliver (evil brother of romantic hero Orlando) has embraced goodness after his brother saves him first from a snake, then a lion."

"In typical productions, these things will be glossed over, treated as if they're ordinary happenings, not surprising in the least," Ingagiola says. "Our production will try to emphasize these incongruities. Isn't that odd?"

Whatever its inconsistencies, "As You Like It" remains one of Shakespeare's best-loved and most-performed plays. Set in an under-



James Ingagiola directs and appears in "As You Like It."

mined country, the play conjures up notions of Robin Hood and his Merry Men by idealizing the Forest of Arden as a back-to-nature haven for both body and spirit. The covetous Duke Frederick (played by Robert Bethune) has deposed his sibling Duke Senior (also played by Bethune), who now dwells in the

sadly Nicola's Books at River Village is closing. on wrestler, Charles (Ian Stines). Joining him in disfavor is Duke Senior's daughter and Orlando's true love Rosalind (Joselle Norton), who flees to Arden along with best friend Celia (Melanie Wilson), Frederick's daughter, to avoid possible execution. Joining them is court jester Touchstone (played by Ingagiola).

Lovesick Orlando soon follows, accompanied by elderly servant Adam (Aral Gribble), with his murderous brother Oliver (Scott Blair) in hot pursuit.

"The Brass Tacks Ensemble presents "As You Like It" Thursday-Sunday, June 7-10 and June 14-17 at Performance Network's TreeTown Festival, 120 E. Huron St. Curtain is 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$15 general, \$12 students/seniors. Thursday is Pay-What-You-Can Night. For reservations, call (734) 668-0681.

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