

Royal Shakespeare Company, 1992–3

(director David Thacker)



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This production opened almost like a Jacobean tragedy. Duke Frederick's court was a dark and menacing place: 'a sombre palace with defensively studded main doors, [and] a dark glassy sheen to the floor' (Martin Hoyle, *The Times*, April 1993). The Forest of Arden in contrast was dominated by a huge solitary tree with twisted, tangled branches that magically sprouted flowers as the play unfolded. Yet darkness never entirely vanished from this Arden setting either (see image above).

Samantha Bond (pictured above right), who played the role of Rosalind when the production opened, combined 'a delightful comic flair with a lovely quality of pensiveness. Towards the end, while all the other couples loll around on the mossy bank ... [this] Rosalind, still in disguise, sits downstage lost in wistful consideration by the pond' (Paul Taylor, *Independent*, April 1992). Kate Buffery, who took over the role in 1993, was more rangy and athletic and made a more convincing 'boy', but some reviewers felt she lacked the ability to convey the erotic tensions between herself and Orlando.

Peter de Jersey as Orlando (pictured above left) was dismissed by some reviewers as handsome but characterless, while Phyllida Hancock as Celia was 'always pleasant and upper-middle genteel, without any touch of the astringency that sharpens the best Celias' (David Murray, *Financial Times*, April 1992). Anthony O'Donnell portrayed Touchstone as 'a surly, officious little Welshman ... [who] sulks and poms his way about the place, glumly fishing and pontificating until he tries a love affair with Susan-Jane Tanner's unalluring Audrey as a way to lift his wilting spirits' (Nicholas de Jongh, *Evening Standard*, April 1992). Michael Siberry's Jaques was played as 'a disenchanting hippie whose faith in human nature has been tainted by a brutal traveller's existence' (Maureen Paton, *Daily Express*, April 1993).

- 1 Review the images of this production and make notes on what *you* think audiences would have enjoyed about it.
- 2 Which of the above comments and descriptions have intrigued, inspired or annoyed you most, and why?