“No... the world *must* be peopled!” So splutters a very panicky Benedick, desperately grappling for any kind of justification for the disturbing situation he finds himself in – he is, despite all the cynical bravado he can muster, in love with Beatrice. And what a perfectly hilarious delivery it is.

Even though what must have been the most temperamental weather in history was taking place, the rain-drenched spectators standing in the Yard were as completely immersed and appreciative as those with the padded seats. A production that has you in its frivolous, funny and intelligent grasp from beginning to end, *Much Ado About Nothing* is undoubtedly one of the highlights of The Globe’s 2011 season.

Although almost never derailing itself from Shakespeare’s text, keeping the Elizabethan attire and having a very performative feel that borders on a meta-awareness of its own storytelling, there is something to Herrin’s staging and his actors’ delivery that gives *Much Ado* an astounding sense of belonging. It is firmly yet effortlessly in tune with contemporary sense of humour whilst remaining faithful to everyone’s favourite bantering couple.

The lighthearted set of orange trees and a vaguely Ottoman musical ensemble compliments the tone of the first half, filled with witty verbal battles, disguises, misunderstandings and betrothals, typical of many a Shakespearean comedy. Yet Herrin soon proves he can do drama as well – the accusations against and the rejection of Hero (Ony Uhiara) by the indignant and naive Claudio (Philip Cumbus), Beatrice’s request of Benedick to kill him for hurting her cousin, and a haunting eulogy at Hero’s grave add a poignant respite from the side-splitting moments to drive the performance forward. The actors, though, seem to be able to pull off a good one-liner even in those dark moments: asides such as Benedick’s interruption of
Claudio’s outburst with a “this looks not like a nuptial scene” purposefully seem to tease Shakespeare’s text for its rather more obvious statements.

As it is with all stagings of Much Ado, however, the weight of success lies heavily on the shoulders of Benedick and Beatrice, who must be equally matched in the strength of their performances. This is where Herrin’s production, thanks to Charles Edwards and Eve Best, gains a completely sound foundation and almost all of its audience engagement. Edwards and Best are both effortlessly skilled in their comic timing and impeccably in character. Their chemistry is evident and fully believable; their discomposure at finding themselves head-over-heels for each other, masked by their pride and wit, is completely endearing. The cheer from the audience is almost cathartic when we finally get the kiss, mid-Beatrice-rant, with Benedick’s “Peace, woman, I will stop thy tongue!”

Definitely worth a trip to the beautifully remodeled 17th-century theatre, The Globe’s Much Ado About Nothing is a production that stems from such strong performances from its actors, and clearly possesses such a celebratory appreciation of its own text, that it makes for a truly successful and uplifting experience.