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## Make merry with the Windsor Wives at Theatricum Botanicum

By [Candyce Columbus](#), LA Theater Examiner



Clockwise from front: Amy Greenspan, Ted Barton, Elizabeth Tobias, Tim Halligan and Karen Reed  
Photo by Miriam Geer

Audience members are bound to feel merry at Theatricum Botanicum's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. One of William Shakespeare's earliest and less frequently performed works. Under Ellen Geer's skillful direction this play features a highly talented cast adept at iambic pentameter and conveying the intricate plot.

As the "merry wives" Elizabeth Tobias (Mistress Ford) and Karen Reed (Mistress Page) were clearly having fun playing romantic pranks on Sir John Falstaff (Alan Blumenfeld) whose opinion of his personal magnetism is grossly inflated.

Veteran Botanicum company member Blumenfeld excels as one of Shakespeare's most memorable characters, the vain, pompous Falstaff who has the gall to send two wealthy women identical love letters.

In one of those plot twists for which the Bard was famous, Master Page (Tim Halligan) is unconcerned but the jealous Master Ford (Ted Barton) becomes unintentionally duped into believing both their wives were unfaithful with none other than Falstaff.

Playing the young lovers in the Sunday, June 12 performance (the roles are double cast) Michael Aurelio (Fenton) and Clare Fogerty (Anne Page) were appealing and charming.

Worth the price of admission alone was a bravura performance by Barton. Using a myriad of apoplectic facial expressions, booming voice and big physicality, Barton both as Master Ford and as Master Ford masquerading as Master Brook, elicited many laughs.

Other stand-out performances include Melora Marshall (Mistress Quickly), her mellow, well-behaved dog, Paul Turbiak (Dr. Caius), Gerald C. Rivers (Sir Hugh Evans) and the portly Dylan Booth Vigus as Slender.

Kudos to costume designer Sara Gray, especially for Falstaff's rotund costume.

Terraced into the hillside the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum amphitheater, with its trails and different levels is an ideal venue for Shakespeare, other classics and any play for that matter.

Because the plot is convoluted and dense with many characters, to enhance their enjoyment audience members would be well-advised to read a synopsis before coming to see *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* performs in repertory with *Richard II* and Moliere's *Tartuffe* (including 10 songs) and others through October 2. Tickets are Adults \$32 (lower tier); \$20 (upper tier), Seniors (60+): \$25/\$18, Students, Military Veterans, AEA Members: \$20/\$15, Children (7-12): \$10 and Children 6 and under free. Call 310-455-3723 or visit [www.theatricum.com](http://www.theatricum.com).

The Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum is located at 1419 North Topanga Canyon Blvd. in Topanga, midway between Malibu and the San Fernando Valley. Audience members are advised to dress casually (warmly for evenings) and bring cushions for bench seating.