

**London: LOVE'S METAMORPHOSIS To 29 September.**

Posted by : TimothyRamsden on Sep 25, 2013 - 10:55 PM

**London.**

**LOVE'S METAMORPHOSIS**

by John Lyly.

Pentameters Theatre 28 Heath Street Hampstead NW3 6TE To 29 September 2013.

Tue-Sat 8pm Sun 5pm.

Runs 1hr 20min No interval.

TICKETS: 020 7435 3648.

[www.pentameters.co.uk](http://www.pentameters.co.uk)

Review: Timothy Ramsden 25 September.

**Elegance and artifice from the Elizabethan repertory.**

While William Shakespeare was making his name as a playwright, Kentish lad John Lyly, a decade older, wrote this play, probably a few years before Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost*. If so, Lyly stands as an evident influence.

Shakespeare would have an unkind word to say about the popular children's theatre companies of the 1590s, for whom Lyly almost exclusively wrote. That's clear within a few lines. Here is a debate on love conducted in the classical world with a sense of abstraction rather than involvement. Children would have been ideal for roles that discuss rather than experience emotions.

It's also evidence young performers have always fancied the macabre. Within a few minutes a woman transformed into a tree is mercilessly hacked by farmer Erisicichthon, insisting on his property rights. Later, in a still-shocking moment, he sells his daughter Protea to a merchant: Laura Danielle suffers as both characters, well-deserving her part in the happy end reached by all.

But it's the three maidenly followers of Ceres and their young forester swains who recall *Love's Labours*. The trio of Nymphs (a term that's gone downmarket nowadays) are transformed into objects once by Cupid, whose argument on love with the women's leader Ceres, ably played by Dominic Morgan and Holly Morgan, is the play's elegant centrepiece.

They nearly have another dose of becoming inanimate objects when they try denying Cupid's wishes. Instead, all ends in an extended dance to Philippe Martinez's attractive score.

Artificial elegance in language – both exercised and mocked in Shakespeare's play – are Lyly characteristics, and Cecile Dorland's production goes fully for them. Sometimes, with smiling Nymphs tripping the stage as in a very polite girls' school playground, the effect seems twee, though doubtless accurate.

But better than attempting a grittier, less apt modern style. Lyly had a brief career as a novelist, went on to write plays then, disappointed in his ambition to be an arts bureaucrat as Master of the Revels, faded into poverty. He'd surely have been delighted Pentameters have

found a space for him among the usual plethora of *Malfis*, *Revenger's* and rare Ben Jonsons.

Ceres: Holly Morgan.

Cupid: Dominic Morgan.

Nisa: Ava Amade.

Celia: Sibylla Meienberg.

Niobe: Judith Georgi.

Ramis: Tom Wharnsby.

Montanus: Edmund Sage-Green.

Silvestris: Pip Brignall.

Erisichthon: Gavin Duff.

Fidelia/Protea: Laura Danielle Sharp.

Petolius/Chorus: Mathew Lewis-Carter.

Merchant/Chorus: Edward Fisher.

Director: Cecilia Dorland.

Lighting: Penny Rischmiller, Ollie Edwards.

Music: Philippe Martinez.

Movement: Carolyn Wheeler.

Period Movement: Darren Royston.

Costume/Literary adviser: Gisèle Venet.