



The Modern Side of Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor



The three stars of Two River Theater's *Merry Wives of Windsor* speak to WBGO's Doug Doyle



The Merry Wives of Windsor at Two River Theater in Red Bank
CREDIT TWO RIVER THEATER

By DOUG DOYLE & KEN DOWNEY JR.

Featuring only three actors—**Nicole Lewis**, **Jason O’Connell**, and **Zuzanna Szadkowski**—this production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* explores the darker undercurrent of one of Shakespeare’s silliest comedies. In the play, the lecherous buffoon John Falstaff decides to seduce both Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, respectable married women of Windsor. When

the two women immediately see through Falstaff's plot, they decide to turn the tables on him and devise a plot of their own.

Zuzanna Szadkowski is enjoying her time at Two River Theater. She plays Mistress Page in this adaptation of *Merry Wives of Windsor*:

"It is a really fun ride for us, and hopefully the audience. I think that people who expect something from 'Merry Wives' will be surprised by our production. So that's a really fun twist for us."

Szadkowski is also known for her role as the maid "Dorota" in the teen television drama *Gossip Girl*:

"I love acting, so to me, acting is acting. I think working on TV a lot, people always ask if I like that more than stage. I think fundamentally it's about looking at your scene partner and like playing or pretending, and surprising each other and having fun."



The cast of Merry Wives of Windsor at Two River Theater
CREDIT DOUG DOYLE FOR WBGO

Jason O'Connell plays John Falstaff. He's performed in many Shakespeare productions throughout his career:

"I was very reticent to do any Shakespeare when I started acting. I actually started in stand-up comedy. Then I went to college for theater, and made, what I thought at the time, was a

grand mistake, to go to a school that specialized in Shakespeare. I had no interest in it. And by being forced to be a part of Shakespeare and experience it as an actor and audience member in school, I slowly grew to fall in love with it.”

O’Connell is also a stand-up comedian. He puts his acting and comedic skills together in this show:

“It’s about being open and vulnerable to all possibilities. No matter if you’re in the company of 30 actors, or you’re up there alone by yourself.”

Mistress Ford is played by Nicole Lewis:

“It’s a little more relatable to today. So for audiences who have never seen a Shakespeare (play) before will really appreciate this.”



Nicole Lewis and Jason O’Connell in Merry Wives of Windsor
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Lewis, who has performed in Broadway productions of *Hair* and *Rent*, is delighted to return to a Shakespeare play:

“I am a big fan of Shakespeare, and I have luckily had the opportunity to do a few plays. One of the really beautiful things about it is, that it’s really all in the language; it’s all in the words. They say just about everything.”

This adaptation takes place in a seedy motel room and the three cast members all play more than one character on stage.

Zuzanna Szadkowski, Jason O’Connell and Nicole Lewis all call New York City home and say they are having a blast at Two River Theater under the direction of Eric Tucker.

O'Connell says this play really gets to the darkness of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*:
"It is ridiculous, very very funny and zany but it also has the dark undertones. I've been in five productions of this play, full cast productions, I've never seen or been a part of one like this. I think this one, in many ways, is the truest to what Shakespeare wrote."