

## Shakespeare

### Fun to Play

Susan Hingley

#### How the Japanese audience responds to *Much Ado About Nothing*

Japanese audiences probably approach *Much Ado About Nothing* thinking that it's a foreign play set in Italy. These foreign lovers, what are they doing, it's so different to us. But fundamentally the relationships between the man and woman of both couples – so Beatrice/Benedick, Claudio/Hero, the two couples – they could happen anywhere. So I think that's how Japanese people fall in love with the story as well. The way it's written in English there's a pentameter, there's a rhythm and a lot of imagery in it. The imagery completely translates into Japanese, but the rhythm doesn't quite translate because of the nature of the language. So for me when Japanese people do Shakespeare it becomes much more visual and a joy to watch. A spectacle. Whereas in England it's much more about the words, the words, deliver the words and the beauty in the language. Whereas in Japan it's much more, it's more like a painting when you watch a Shakespeare play. And I think the more successful versions are when a Japanese company do it their way and not try and do it in a Western way. So I recently saw a Kabuki version of *Twelfth Night* and it was amazing. It was incredibly original, beautiful. Nobody else could do it and the story completely made sense as well. It was all men dressed up, painted, playing female and male, all the roles. And beautiful to watch.

#### A Japanese view of Hero and Beatrice

I think Japanese women are traditionally more like a Hero character. So even today I think women are ... men and women are equal in Japan but there's much more of a sense that you should be married and have children by a certain age. And you should leave work and be the housewife and do what you're told. Traditionally that sense is there and it's probably stronger than what women are expected to be over here in England, in the West. So I think maybe women in Japan are more inclined to be like Hero than Beatrice. And I think Beatrice is probably a much more Western woman from a Japanese perspective. But things are changing. Japan has modernised ridiculously. It's expensive to live in Japan so women have to work, which means they're stronger, they're independent and they become more like Beatrice. So I think Japanese women can relate to both.