

the Real
Merry Wives
OF WINDSOR Gardens

by William Shakespeare

Audition Information Pack

for the 2026 production of William Shakespeare's
'The Merry Wives of Windsor' produced by the
University of Adelaide Theatre Guild
and directed by Mark Wickett

The Play in a Breath

Margaret and Alice are wealthy, independent women. An unscrupulous noble, Falstaff, tries to seduce them both to get his hands on their money. The wives are smarter than him, and instead he's humiliated. Their husbands think they know better too, but don't. Anne's parents try to arrange her marriage to two different men, but she outsmarts everyone and marries who she wants.

The Play in a Few Breaths

Sir John Falstaff needs money. He thinks a quick way to paying his debts is to seduce the wife of a wealthy merchant, Margaret Page. To increase his chances, he writes the same letter to another merchant's wife, Anne Ford.

Meanwhile, Margaret's daughter Anne is being pursued by two suitors: Margaret prefers the French Dr Caius; her husband George encourages Slender, the cousin of Justice Shallow (who is chasing Falstaff's debts), supported by the Welsh parson Evans. Anne herself prefers Fenton, much to her father's disapproval. Mistress Quickly is not of the same wealth or class as the Pages and Fords yet is more streetwise as she shuttles between houses misdelivering messages.

The two powerful women regularly catch-up and they realise they are being targeted separately by the same man – so they take revenge on Falstaff, setting up a meeting with him. Francis Ford is informed of Falstaff's intentions, but not by his wife, and when he finds out she has arranged to meet Falstaff, he's angry at her apparent betrayal.

Alice convinces Falstaff to hide in a laundry basket to avoid her husband's wrath, but that basket is then dumped in the river. Margaret arranges a similar meeting, at which Falstaff is persuaded to disguise himself as an elderly aunt – one that a returning George dislikes, so chases her/him out of the house.

Eventually confiding in their husbands, there is one last prank to play, which involves Falstaff disguising himself as Herne the Hunter, only to be teased by 'fairies'. Amongst the mayhem of this final revenge, Anne elopes with Fenton, whilst her other suitors realise they the woman they each ran away with is just one of the 'fairies'.

Only Falstaff's ego is hurt. Francis is admonished for his mistrust, whilst the Page's accept their daughter's choice.

The Vision

Summary

The vision is to present the Shakespeare comedy using the language from the 1623 First Folio but resetting its time and place from a bustling 16th century English town to a 21st century suburb of Adelaide, Australia, and leaning into reality television from the *Real Housewives* franchise.

It is vital to ensure the comedy and farce are strong, but with an underbelly of more challenging themes. This is a play to challenge the audience's preconceptions of gender, culture, class, and influence – though it's always to entertain.

Editing the text

There will be some trimming of some scenes and inappropriate language. This would help to simplify some of the story and reduce the running time to no more than two hours, plus an interval – other productions have been as long as three hours.

The Real Housewives™

The *Real Housewives* franchise is a collection of reality TV shows that follows wealthy women who all live in a particular city, showing their relationships, particularly between other women. Perhaps more famous for its verbal and physical stoushes between over-confident and entitled women, it also plays to women's power from themselves and their networks – which is our intended focus here.

The integration of this concept into the Shakespeare text will be as a parody of the franchise and we will not breach the trademarks held by the production company (Bravo Media LLC). It is intended to be light-handed and light-hearted, there to provide background and context through humorous lines spoken as if to camera, as 'talking heads' from all reality television shows. The intent is that these inter-scene segments are delivered live to a camera (either on or off stage) and projected in real-time to the audience.

Thematic Emphasis

- **Powerful women and their networks** – positive representation of the lives of real women in Shakespeare's England, yet also noting that the two wives are privileged.
- **Gender, sexism and sexual attitudes** – roles of men and women; attitudes of each to the other; romantic and sexual freedom.
- **Multiculturalism** – for 17th century England, it's Welsh and French; for 21st century Adelaide, this would be a broader culture mix, including First Nations people, Europeans, Kiwis and Bogans.
- **Class system** – not just those with money versus those without: those with a title and no money are considered 'more important' than those without a title but with money.

The Players

As written, there are at least 22 speaking roles, though the aim is to have a company of at least 16, with some performers playing more than one character.

With a few exceptions, there is no expectation that the **genders** or **heterosexuality** written by Shakespeare need be preserved in this production. The exceptions are indicated in the character table below with the appropriate symbol.

Age ranges are indicative and are for appearance on the stage, not the age of the performer themselves, e.g. Margaret Page must be convincing as a mother to a just-adult daughter.

Differing **cultural backgrounds** are a feature of this play, but the accents and dialects may not be French or Welsh as written.

Numbers of **cues** and **lines** are indicative, based on the original text. There will be some editing which will reduce the number of these.

Character descriptions are intentionally broad – the details of the characters will be developed by the actors themselves, working with the creative team.

Character Age Cues Lines

Audition Information Pack

Alice Ford	♀	35-55	85	171	One of the Merry Wives, independent, clever, perceptive.		
Margaret Page	♀	35-55	97	301	One of the Merry Wives, determined, strong-willed, defiant.		
Sir John Falstaff	♂	45-65	135	437	A rogue with large debts, creative in trying to make money		
Francis Ford		35-55	96	303	Middle-aged, middle class and middling – jealous of his wife Alice		
George Page		35-55	67	134	Middle-aged, middle class but much more laid back; husband to Margaret, father to Anne and William		
Mistress Quickly		25-55	71	236	Dr Caius' housekeeper aspiring to greater things, with a filthy mind – has to sing one short song.		
Sir Hugh Evans		45-65	87	224	A parson and schoolmaster, still carrying his Welsh roots and voice – he has to sing a brief song (but not expertly).		
Dr Caius		35-55	47	91	An irritable French doctor, trying to woo Anne Page.		
Anne Page	♀	18-25	23	62	A young woman desperate to break free of her family's aspirations and live life her own way.		
Fenton / Nim / First Servant	}	18-25	19/ 13/ 3	85/ 27/ 3	Fenton is a young gentleman attracted to Anne Page; Nim is a follower of Falstaff; the First Servant works for the Fords and at one point has to carry a heavy basket.		
Slender			25-35	53		128	Shallow's nephew, with money but little sense; wants to marry Anne Page
Justice Shallow			55-85	57		114	A respectable yet foolish judge
Bardolph / Rugby	}	25-45	14/ 9	23/ 10	Bardolph is a follower of Falstaff – here, works the bar at the Garter; Rugby is Dr Caius' servant.		
Pistol / Simple / Second Servant			}	18-25		30/ 25/ 1	60/ 48/ 1
Host	35-55	46			112	The jolly and verbose innkeeper of the Garter	
William / Robin	}	18-25			11/ 6	12/ 13	William is the young son of Margaret and George; Robin is Falstaff's page.
Various others			15+	0	0	A Postmaster's Boy and other young people, largely playing fairies and pretending to be Anne Page.	

The Company

The *University of Adelaide Theatre Guild* is the second oldest amateur theatre company in South Australia, having celebrated its 85th anniversary in 2023. It stages both mainstream and obscure plays through the main company and its student society. You do not need to be associated with the University to be involved in a *Guild* production – though you will need to sign-up as a member.

Audition Information Pack

The Audition

If you're interested in performing in this production, you will be auditioned by the creative team.

1. You **must** book an audition spot and fill out an **audition form**.
2. You should turn up a few minutes before your audition time, so you have time to check in and warm up beforehand.
3. You can nominate the part(s) you're interested in – but you don't have to, and whether you do or don't, it won't unfairly influence the audition panel.
4. You will be auditioned as **part of a group**.
5. You should **prepare a short monologue or soliloquy** from a Shakespeare play – it need not be from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but it should showcase your talent and abilities to play the part(s) you're interested in playing. You don't have to memorise it for the audition.
6. You will also be asked to **read a scene from the play** with others from your group – it may not be for your preferred part.

You will be advised by e-mail or telephone call whether you are successful or not, and as soon as practical after all auditions have been completed.

The Commitment

If you are successful in being offered a part following auditions, you will be expected to attend the read-through, all rehearsals where your character(s) are required, and all performances, unless previously arranged with the director, as follows:

- An initial **read-through** with all the cast, creatives and crew will be held in late January.
- **Rehearsals** start late February (during *Adelaide Fringe*), these will be Tuesday and Thursday evenings, starting at 6.30pm until 9.30pm, and Sundays from 1pm until 5pm. Rehearsals will be in the Little Theatre whenever possible, and in alternative locations on the University's city campus when not.
- **Bump-in** to the Little Theatre will be Friday 1st May, with rehearsals during the day Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd May, then each evening from Monday 4th until a Dress rehearsal / Preview on Thursday 7th May. **Evening performances** will be at 7.30pm on Friday 8th (opening night) and Thursday 14th and Friday 15th. **Matinee performances** will be at 3pm on Saturdays 9th and 16th and Sunday 10th and 17th May (closing night). An **Early Evening performance** will start at 6.30pm on Wednesday 13th May, with a Q&A session afterwards.

All dates are indicative and will be confirmed in January 2026.

The Research

Strongly recommended is the *New Oxford Shakespeare* edition of this play (from which the text for this production is sourced), which has a heap of explanatory notes on every page to assist your comprehension of the language and its intent in the scene.

The Rest

If you still have questions, please e-mail the team at realmerrywives@duckandgoat.com.