

# TWELFTH NIGHT: PRESS RESPONSES

İstanbul Municipal Theatre (2015)

**Written by:** William Shakespeare **Directed By:** Serdar Biliş

## SABAH GAZETESİ

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## A Bold Reimagining of Twelfth Night

### A VISUAL FEAST

Directed by Serdar Biliş, renowned for his work on War, which was named “Play of the Year” by the Theatre Critics’ Association last year, this production is nothing short of a visual extravaganza. Employing video art and live camera projections onto screens, the play gains an extraordinary richness. The underwater imagery, combined with elements such as a diver’s suit, an enormous fish, towering cacti, moving mirrors, vibrant costumes, and a stage that transforms into a boxing ring, creates a mesmerizing visual landscape. The single-act, 100-minute play dazzles the eye as much as it stirs the heart.

At the core of this vivid spectacle is Viola, who, believing her twin brother to have perished in a shipwreck, disguises herself as a man to serve the Duke of Illyria, Orsino. The narrative unfolds with humor and intrigue, capturing the complexities of identity, love, and miscommunication.

Bennu Yıldırımlar delivers an awe-inspiring performance as Olivia, matched by Özge Özder's lively portrayal of Feste, Levend Öktem's precise take on the puritanical Malvolio, and Senan Kara Tutumluer's impressive dual portrayal of the twins Viola and Sebastian. Their collective brilliance elevates the production to remarkable heights.

Beyond their acting prowess, the cast charms the audience with enchanting songs and spirited dances, earning thunderous applause. Biliş's masterful direction weaves this colorful chaos into a cohesive and enthralling whole, resulting in a play that lingers in the mind like a dream—radiant, surreal, and unforgettable.

### **ALREADY A CONTENDER FOR AWARDS**

With its tale of mistaken identity and unrequited love, this delightful production offers a thoroughly entertaining theatrical experience. Translated into Turkish by Zeynep Avcı, the play benefits immensely from the rich contributions of Çiğdem Erken's music, Gamze Kuş's striking costume and stage design, and Cem Yilmazer's masterful lighting and video design.

From the outstanding performances to the intricate set, costumes, and lighting, every element comes together seamlessly to create a show that stands among the most ambitious productions of the season. Garnering praise for its artistry and execution, the play has already positioned itself as a strong contender for numerous awards in the months to come.

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### Masculinity and Duality in Twelfth Night

#### *A Director's Triumph*

Acclaimed director Serdar Biliş, celebrated for winning audiences over with nearly every production he stages, once again mesmerizes with his unique interpretation of this unforgettable masterpiece. Biliş demonstrates a deep understanding of audience expectations, skillfully enhancing the play's pacing with dynamic and, at times, musical-like sequences that breathe fresh energy into the performance. Successfully orchestrating a production of this scale is no small feat, yet Biliş manages it with grace and ingenuity, earning well-deserved praise for his masterful direction.

Bennu Yıldırımlar delivers a performance as the play's protagonist that will undoubtedly remain etched in memory for years to come. She brings raw authenticity to her portrayal of a character caught in the paradox of mourning and emotional volatility, navigating this delicate balance with sincerity and depth.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Özge Özder sets the rhythm of the play. Her portrayal of an eccentric, larger-than-life character ignites both excitement and affection in the audience. As a viewer, I found myself eagerly anticipating her every entrance—her presence on stage was a highlight, brimming with energy and charm.

This production stands as a testament to the transformative power of theatre, a collaboration of artistry and vision that leaves its audience thoroughly captivated.

## **A Triumph of Design and Collaboration**

In the realm of set design, Gamze Kuş presents a masterstroke of meticulous craftsmanship, weaving together diverse spaces into a unified and cohesive visual narrative. Every detail has been carefully considered, showcasing her exceptional talent for creating atmospheres that resonate deeply with the audience. Her work doesn't just complement the play; it elevates it, drawing viewers into a world that is both intricate and immersive. As for costume design, it stands as a showpiece in its own right, worthy of boundless praise. Kuş brings class and period authenticity to life on stage with extraordinary finesse, crafting designs that are as historically rooted as they are breathtakingly beautiful. Truly, her work is nothing short of a triumph.

Turning to lighting design, Cem Yılmaz once again proves why he remains a standout figure in his field. Known for his consistently impressive work, Yılmaz meets—and surpasses—expectations, crafting lighting schemes that not only enhance the production's visual appeal but also deepen its emotional and thematic layers. His contributions add an indispensable richness to an already stellar production.

As I've highlighted in earlier reflections, *Twelfth Night* exemplifies the kind of play that aligns seamlessly with the ethos and structure of the City Theatres. It showcases the boundless possibilities of theatre when creative vision and technical mastery come together in perfect harmony.

Uniting exceptional talents in direction, performance, set design, costume design, and lighting, this staging of *Twelfth Night* stands as a testament to collaborative artistry at its finest. Destined to claim its place among the most memorable productions in the City Theatres' history, it represents the pinnacle of what theatre can achieve. My heartfelt congratulations to the entire team for bringing this extraordinary work to life and offering it to audiences as an unforgettable experience.

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### **A Bold Feast of Defiance**

Under the masterful direction of Serdar Biliş, Shakespeare's enduring classic Twelfth Night emerges as a theatrical feast, boldly embarking on a journey to dismantle taboos. This timeless masterpiece is reimagined with a fearless energy, transforming its centuries-old legacy into a vibrant, boundary-breaking celebration of the human spirit. The Dreamscape of Twelfth Night: Breaking Boundaries

The cornerstone of Serdar Biliş's boundary-breaking interpretation lies in his embrace of the 'dream' motif, a recurring theme in Shakespeare's comedies. Rather than merely acknowledging it, Biliş places this theme at the very heart of the production. In Twelfth Night, the line between dream and reality blurs, weaving an atmosphere where Viola and Sebastian's twinship becomes a metaphor for exploring human identity. The play examines the dissolution of societal and individual boundaries, particularly those related to gender, revealing the "gray areas" of existence.

The dramaturgy and staging are intricately crafted around this dreamlike foundation. Biliş's vision recalls Carl Gustav Jung's assertion that "every man carries within him the eternal image of the woman, and every woman carries the eternal image of the man," drawing the audience into a profound reflection on sexual identity and the duality within us all. By infusing his interpretation with layered meaning, the director leaves no gaps, ensuring every detail supports his vision.

Biliş doesn't stop at psychological depth. With boldness and creativity, he introduces a modern voice to the production, even weaving in quotes from Aziz Nesin. These additions, risky as they might seem, are executed with finesse, blending seamlessly into the

narrative without feeling out of place. The result is a fresh and dynamic adaptation that speaks fluently in the language of today.

While fully grasping the production's intricate layers may be challenging on a first viewing, the intended emotional and intellectual resonance is undeniable. Through a synthesis of intuition and storytelling, Biliş creates an experience that lingers in the mind, provoking thought and inviting reflection long after the curtain falls.

### **More Than a Play: A Theatrical Masterpiece**

It must be said that this is not just a play—it's a colossal production in every sense. Serdar Biliş has utilized every element the performing arts have to offer, and each detail serves a purpose. The meanings are translated into the visual dimension so exquisitely that it's impossible for the audience not to be aesthetically fulfilled. The use of camera projections and videos adds another layer to the recurring theme of dream vs. reality, seamlessly weaving it into the fabric of the production.

The costumes, like every other element on stage, are a feast for the eyes. With a style reminiscent of Tim Burton's films, they introduce a whimsical and symbolic dimension to the dream/reality theme, evoking a fairytale-like quality. The set design, however, stands out for its ingenious use of materials. The careful selection of props and textures to suit the stage's needs reveals the meticulous attention to detail behind the production.

Adding to this richness are the dance, music, choreography, outstanding performances, and even a live orchestra. Together, these elements transform the play into an experience that can only be described as the very definition of theatrical bliss. This is a production where every component, every choice, and every moment contributes to an unforgettable celebration of art.

## **A Team Worth Every Ovation**

It's essential to commend every member of the team behind this near-perfect production —those on stage and those who work tirelessly behind the scenes. Particularly, they deserve recognition for bringing to our stages a production that rivals the world-renowned quality of London's West End theatres. Applauding their efforts simply isn't enough. One must also add this: the future of Turkish theatre lies in works like this, in directors like Serdar Biliş, and in the dedication of a team this committed.

In short, if you're looking to nourish your soul and dismantle the biases floating in your mental bubble this season, the answer isn't just Shakespeare. The answer is, unequivocally, Twelfth Night.

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