

Theater Review: Lillie Langtry and Oscar Wilde hire Sherlock Holmes

By [Jim Lowe](#)

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Photo by Mairi McCormick

From left, Oliver Wadsworth is Oscar Wilde, Kirk Jackson plays Sherlock Holmes and Christopher Edwards is Dr. Watson in Dorset Theatre Festival's mystery-comedy "Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Jersey Lily."

Simply delicious describes perfectly the comedy in the Dorset Theatre Festival's "Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Jersey Lilly," the Katie Forgette mystery-comedy that opened at the Dorset Playhouse Friday. And it was a pretty neat mystery too.

It doesn't hurt that Holmes' and Watson's latest clients are the beautiful and talented actress Lillie Langtry and the infamous playwright Oscar Wilde.

Before this intellectual and action-packed thriller is over, Holmes finds himself doing battle with his notorious archenemy Professor Moriarty to save the good name of Queen Victoria.

What makes this all work is Dorset's taut and sophisticated production that takes you to late-19th century London and doesn't let you alone for a moment. You simply remain on edge — when you're not laughing.

Lilly Langtry and Oscar Wilde arrive at Holmes' Baker Street digs seeking help retrieving damning letters and a photo revealing her affair with "Bertie," the Prince of Wales. When Holmes agrees to

intercede with the blackmailer, he discovers all is not as it seems — or who they seem.

This adventure is made all the juicier with a multitude of lines stolen directly from Oscar Wilde. But if you don't know Wilde, no matter, the lines are uniquely witty by themselves. The play's ending might be a little weak, but by then you don't care because you're having such a good time.

The Dorset production was beautifully choreographed by director Maragarett Perry, fast-paced, attractive and beautifully cast and set. Kirk Jackson as Holmes and Brian Dykstra as Moriarty are particularly well matched, models of dry wit and irony — in, short hilarious.

Still, one of the two funniest portrayals was by Christopher Edwards, who managed to take Dr. John Watson's earnestness to

new heights. The other was Dana Berger who beautifully mixed physical humor and droll wit as the evil forger/actress Kitty Dupree. They were both ridiculously funny.

Jennifer Rohn was an ideal mix of grand dame and “desperate woman” as Langtry, while Oliver Wadsworth was delightfully fey as Wilde. Both occasionally barked their lines, which detracted from the very humor they were aiming for. Still, these were only moments, and both were fine comic portrayals.

Carlos Dengler was also delightfully pathetic as the unfortunate Mr. John Smythe, the butt of everyone’s jokes. Most importantly, this cast worked as an ensemble, seamlessly facilitating this witty storytelling.

Equal to the stage performances was Dorset’s amazing staging. The ingenious and atmospheric set, that becomes all the needed locations

like a chameleon in period style, was created by Debra Booth, lit with real drama by Michael Gianitti. Extravagant but appropriate costumes were by David Toser. And an unusually effective soundscape, using snippets of classical music to underscore the action and atmosphere, was by Jane Shaw.

Dorset's "Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Jersey Lilly" lays waste the claim that theater must be silly schlock to be delightful light summer entertainment. This was fun.

Dorset Theatre Festival

Dorset Theatre Festival presents "Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Jersey Lily," a mystery-comedy by Katie Forgette, July 9-25 at the Dorset Playhouse, 104 Cheney Road in Dorset. Remaining

performances are at 3 p.m. today (July 12); 3 and 8 p.m. Wednesday, July 15; 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday, July 16-17; 3 and 8 p.m. Saturday, July 18; 3 p.m. Sunday, July 19; 8 p.m. Tuesday, July 21; 3 and 8 p.m. Wednesday, July 22; and 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, July 23-25. Ticket are \$49-\$20, \$20 for students; \$8 for 12 and younger; call 867-2223, or go online to dorsettheatrefestival.org.