



HILLBARK
PLAYERS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

TWELFTH NIGHT AUDITIONS

Auditions for our production
of Twelfth Night will take place
on **Saturday 3rd October**

The Church Hall, St John the Divine,
Frankby Booking is essential



Further details from www.hillbarkplayers.co.uk
or find us on social media @hillbarkplayers

TWELFTH NIGHT AUDITION PACK - Hillbark Players 2027

Welcome to Hillbark Players

Hillbark Players is the longest-running presenter of open-air Shakespeare in the North West. The company was founded in 1964 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and, apart from a short break in the early 1970s and the Covid hiatus, Hillbark Players has presented a major production every other year since.

Our major productions aim for the highest possible standards, bringing together some of the best local talent both on stage and behind the scenes.

Every two years, a purpose-built theatre is created in Royden Park, Frankby, just outside West Kirby on the Wirral. The auditorium seats almost 500 people beneath cover, with full theatre lighting and sound – although the actors themselves remain at the mercy of the British summer!

For performers, crew and audiences alike, a Hillbark production is much more than simply another play. For a few weeks Royden Park is transformed into a theatre, and the company becomes a community.

The word most often used to describe the Hillbark experience is **magical**.

In June 2027, we are delighted to return to the park with one of Shakespeare's most joyful, funny and gloriously chaotic comedies. We hope you will consider joining us.

The Directorial Team - Ruth Cooper and Stuart Rathe

Ruth and Stuart are long-standing members of Hillbark Players, with extensive experience as actors, directors and theatre-makers.

Ruth has been a Hillbarker since appearing as a fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2001 and has since worked both onstage and backstage as a performer, producer, assistant director and director. She is also the society's Vice-Chair. Stuart is well known to Hillbark audiences through roles in productions including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet*. He is also an experienced teacher and previously worked as Education Manager for Shakespeare Schools Foundation, producing resources, training teachers and working with young people to encourage a love and understanding of Shakespeare.

Together, Ruth and Stuart co-directed Hillbark's 2019 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Julius Caesar* in 2023. Their productions have been celebrated for bold visual ideas, strong use of chorus and ensemble work, and a commitment to making Shakespeare immediate, accessible and entertaining for modern audiences. Most importantly, they want audiences to feel fully engaged in their shows — and to have a really good time.

Away from Hillbark, Ruth and Stuart are proud members of Neston Players, where their directing credits include *The Railway Children* — for which they won the NODA North West Award for Best Direction — *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and, most recently, *Great Expectations*.

Twelfth Night – The Story in Ten Parts

- **Shipwreck and separation** – Viola is shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria and believes her twin brother Sebastian has drowned. Alone in a strange land, she decides to disguise herself as a young man named Cesario for safety and employment.
- **Entering Orsino's service** – Viola-as-Cesario becomes a page to Duke Orsino, who is hopelessly in love with the noblewoman Olivia. Viola quickly falls in love with Orsino herself, though she can't reveal it.
- **The reluctant messenger** – Orsino sends Cesario to woo Olivia on his behalf, since Olivia has rejected his own advances. This puts Viola in the awkward position of pleading for a love she wishes were hers.
- **Olivia falls for Cesario** – Instead of falling for Orsino through his messenger, Olivia falls in love with Cesario (Viola in disguise), creating a tangled love triangle: Orsino loves Olivia, Olivia loves "Cesario," and Viola loves Orsino.
- **The comic subplot begins** – In Olivia's household, her drunken uncle Sir Toby Belch, his foolish friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and the maid Maria conspire to prank the pompous, puritanical steward Malvolio.
- **The forged letter** – Maria writes a fake love letter in Olivia's handwriting, tricking Malvolio into believing his mistress secretly loves him and wants him to act strangely to prove his affection.
- **Malvolio's humiliation** – Malvolio follows the letter's absurd instructions (wearing yellow stockings, smiling constantly), which convinces Olivia he's gone mad. He's locked away and further tormented by the pranksters, including the jester Feste.
- **Sebastian arrives** – Viola's twin brother Sebastian, who actually survived the shipwreck, arrives in Illyria. He's mistaken for Cesario by various characters, including Olivia, who impulsively marries him.
- **Mistaken identities collide** – The confusion escalates until Viola and Sebastian finally appear together, revealing the truth of the twins and resolving the romantic confusion.
- **Resolution** – Orsino, realizing Cesario is really Viola, decides to marry her instead; Olivia is content with Sebastian; and most loose ends are tied up happily—except for Malvolio, who exits vowing revenge on everyone who wronged him.

Our Twelfth Night

Twelfth Night is one of Shakespeare's funniest, most joyous and romantic plays.

Viola – believing her twin brother drowned in a shipwreck – is washed ashore in the land of Illyria. To survive, she disguises herself as a young man, Cesario, and enters the service of Duke Orsino, who himself is madly in love with the Lady Olivia. But Olivia is mourning the death of her brother, and her household is a sad and gloomy place.

As Orsino's go-between, Viola/Cesario unwittingly unleashes romantic confusion and mayhem.

Meanwhile, downstairs in the servants' quarters at Olivia's house, a pompous butler is about to get his comeuppance...

Our production will not be tied to a particular era or timeframe. Instead, we want to emphasise both the strangeness of Illyria and the contrast between the romantic decadence of Orsino's court and the stifling melancholy of Olivia's house, and the way in which these two worlds come together.

There will be a strong emphasis on **ensemble playing**, with the wider company helping us to create the world of the play at key moments throughout.

Music will also be an important part of the show. Feste's songs are woven through the play itself, but we are interested in exploring how music, movement and the ensemble can contribute more widely to the atmosphere and storytelling.

Key Dates and Venues

Before committing to an audition, please make sure you are able to make the key production dates.

Auditions

Saturday 3 October 2026 from 9:30am
Church Hall, St John the Divine, Frankby, CH49 3PE

First Company Meeting

Sunday 28th February 2027 at 1:15pm

Rehearsals Begin

Sunday 7th March 2027 at 1:15pm

Production Week – on site in Royden Park

Saturday 19th – Saturday 26th June 2027

All cast will need to be available during production week for technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals and performances.

Schools' Performance

We hope to hold our traditional daytime performance for local schools during production week.

Wednesday 23rd June 2027 ALL DAY

Cast members would need to be available during the day for this performance.

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsals will normally take place on:

Tuesday evenings – 7.30pm–10.00pm

Thursday evenings – 7.30pm–10.00pm

Sunday afternoons – approximately 1.15pm–4.00pm

at St John the Divine Church Hall, Frankby.

A detailed rehearsal schedule will be provided once the play has been cast.

You will **not necessarily be called to every rehearsal**. We will do our best to ensure that people are only called when they are needed.

Prior to audition, however, you will be asked to give us details of any existing commitments or dates on which you will not be available. Regular or substantial absences may need to be taken into consideration when we cast the production.

Audition Dates and Details

Auditions will take place on:

Saturday 3rd October 2026

at:

**St John the Divine Church Hall
Frankby
CH49 3PE**

Auditions will take place in two parts. We ask everyone to attend at 9:45am for the **workshop** at 10:00am.

From 11:30am, we will see individuals to work on the audition pieces published separately to this document. Between the workshop and your individual audition, you are free to leave and come back.

The running order for auditions is as follows

11:30: Anyone interested in a smaller role/ensemble only. (Followed by lunch break)

12:45: VIOLA/OLIVIA/ORSINO/SEBASTIAN/ANTONIO

2:30: TOBY/MARIA/ANDREW

3:30: MALVOLIO/FESTE

Part One – The Workshop

The first part of the audition will be a group workshop.

There is **nothing to prepare** for this section.

It will include warm-up activities and a mixture of script-based, movement and ensemble work.

We will be interested in:

- how you interact with other performers;
- your willingness to play and experiment;
- your creativity;
- your physical confidence;
- your responsiveness to direction;
- your understanding of character and situation;
- your ability to tell a story as part of an ensemble.

We are not looking for polished performances.

We want to see people being brave, responsive, generous and willing to try things.

The directorial team will run the workshop and there may also be observers in the room to help us gather feedback.

Part Two – Audition Pieces

Following the workshop, we will work on extracts from the play, published in the audition pieces pack. If you wish to be considered for a role not listed, please prepare the Antonio audition piece.

You **do not need to learn your audition piece**.

In fact, we would much rather see you working confidently and imaginatively with the text in your hand than struggling to remember lines.

However, we do expect you to have read the extract beforehand and to have thought about:

- what your character wants;
- who they are speaking to;
- what is happening in the scene;
- how the character might behave physically;
- what changes during the scene.

We may ask you to perform an extract more than once and give you a different direction each time.

That is not a sign that the first attempt was wrong.

Quite the opposite: we want to see how flexible you are and what happens when you are given something new to explore.

If you would like to be considered for more than one role, please tell us. You do not necessarily need to prepare a completely different piece for every character.

We may also ask you to read for characters you have not originally selected.

Booking Your Audition

Please book an audition by completing our pre-audition form. The link is here, or use the QR code below.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScSJhSimy5CEHeAswhDPt80RiKEPyY32jQPgm299tafdgaIZg/viewform>



If there is a genuine reason why you cannot attend any of the published audition sessions, please contact us as soon as possible at:

hillbarkplayers@gmail.com

Which role should I audition for ?

Twelfth Night contains a wonderful range of roles. Some are among Shakespeare's greatest comic characters; others carry the emotional heart of the play. Details about main characters are below.

We are also keen to create a strong **ensemble company**.

Smaller named roles may therefore be combined with ensemble work, and members of the company may play a number of parts.

Please think honestly about how large a commitment you would like.

You are very welcome to tell us:

- that you are particularly interested in one character;
 - that you would like to be considered for several roles;
 - that you would prefer a smaller speaking role;
 - or simply that you would like to be part of the company and are happy for us to decide where you fit best.
-

A Note on Age and Gender

Broad indications of playing age are given alongside the character descriptions below, but these are **guidelines rather than rules**. Please do not rule yourself out simply because you fall outside a suggested age range. Chemistry between characters will be much more important than exact ages.

Hillbark has an open policy regarding gender of actors auditioning for roles. If you think you could play a role well, feel free to audition for it!

For this production, we feel it is important to the clarity of Shakespeare's mistaken-identity plot that Viola and Sebastian are played as opposite-sex twins. We will therefore be casting a female performer as Viola and a male performer as Sebastian. This is a specific artistic choice relating to these two roles. We welcome performers of all gender identities to audition across the company.

Due to chaperoning and dressing-room requirements, we are unable to offer roles to performers under 16 years of age.

Principal Characters

VIOLA / CESARIO

Suggested playing age: 20s–40s

Viola is the emotional centre of the play.

Shipwrecked, separated from her twin brother and alone in an unfamiliar country, she reinvents herself as Cesario. She is intelligent, emotionally intelligent and romantic.

Disguising herself as a young man gives Viola freedom - but rapidly becomes a trap.

Viola needs wit and warmth. Our audience must love her.

This is a large and demanding role requiring strong verse and prose speaking, comic instinct and physical confidence.

ORSINO

Suggested playing age: 20s–50s

Duke Orsino is powerful and charismatic. He is also a hopeless romantic, more in love with the idea of love than any one person.

He surrounds himself with music, poetry and rather likes the sound of his own voice.

Orsino develops an unusually intimate relationship with young servant Cesario and we definitely want to see the boundaries of their friendship and (possibly mutual) attraction become increasingly blurred.

The actor playing Orsino needs to find both the comedy and the genuine feeling underneath his extravagance.

OLIVIA

Suggested playing age: 20s–40s

Olivia begins the play in mourning. Following the deaths of her father and brother, she has withdrawn from society and sworn that she will continue mourning for seven years.

She is intelligent, wealthy and accustomed to being in control, but when Viola-as-Cesario first comes to see her, she forgets her misery and falls hopelessly in love.

Her desperation to see Cesario again, her inability to conceal her feelings and her increasing loss of dignity offer huge comic possibilities.

At the same time, she must convey genuine power, and sadness at the losses she has suffered.

MALVOLIO

Suggested playing age: 30s–60s

Olivia's steward. Malvolio is efficient, serious and superior, and widely loathed by the other servants. He is a puritan, but is also incredibly vain. And his vanity is his undoing. When he finds a forged letter suggesting that Olivia is secretly in love with him, he falls for it hook, line and sinker.

The resulting transformation is one of Shakespeare's great comic opportunities, but one in which Malvolio is mocked and badly treated.

The audience should laugh enormously at Malvolio – but by the end they may also feel sorry for what he has gone through. Our Malvolio needs to be both ridiculous and affecting in his humiliation.

SIR TOBY BELCH

Suggested playing age: 30s–70s

Olivia's uncle. Sir Toby likes drinking, eating, singing, staying up late and doing exactly what he wants.

He has installed his ridiculous friend Sir Andrew in Olivia's household and is happily spending Andrew's money while pretending to help him woo Olivia.

Sir Toby is funny and a drunkard but he is also a great manipulator and rather clever.

A big comic role requiring energy, presence, timing and considerable physical confidence.

SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK

Suggested playing age: 30-50s

Sir Andrew thinks he is an impressive Renaissance gentleman, but he definitely isn't.

He is in Illyria because Sir Toby has convinced him that he might marry Olivia.

Underneath the ridiculousness, he is a man who is desperate to belong.

Excellent comic timing is essential.

MARIA

Suggested playing age: 20s–50s

Olivia's gentlewoman and one of the cleverest people in the play.

When Malvolio threatens to report Sir Toby's behaviour to Olivia, it is Maria who devises the forged-letter plot.

She is energetic, mischievous and extremely funny.

Her relationship with Sir Toby develops during the play and the two eventually marry.

A terrific role for an actor with intelligence, confidence and sharp comic instincts.

FESTE

Playing age: open

Olivia's fool – although he moves easily between Olivia's household and Orsino's court and can speak truths that other characters cannot.

He is witty, observant, playful and sometimes surprisingly melancholy..

Music is central to the role. We expect Feste to sing alone and as part of a group.

We are looking for a strong storyteller and communicator who can connect directly with an audience.

SEBASTIAN

Suggested playing age: similar to Viola

Viola's twin brother. Like Viola, Sebastian survives the shipwreck believing that his sibling has probably died.

He has been rescued by Antonio, to whom he feels enormous gratitude and affection.

When Sebastian arrives in Illyria, strangers repeatedly appear to know him.

His relationship with Viola at the end of the play provides one of its most emotionally satisfying moments.

ANTONIO

Suggested playing age: 20s–60s

A sailor who rescues Sebastian from the wreck.

Antonio's devotion to Sebastian is powerful and unmistakable.

He knows that returning to Illyria is dangerous for him because of his previous conflict with Orsino, but follows Sebastian anyway.

When he believes Sebastian is in danger, Antonio intervenes immediately and is arrested. They have a sincere and loving relationship.

Other Roles

FABIAN

A member of Olivia's household who joins Sir Toby, Maria and Sir Andrew in watching the trick played on Malvolio.

This may be combined with other ensemble work.

SEA CAPTAIN

The Captain survives the shipwreck with Viola and helps her establish herself in Illyria.

A small but important role requiring authority, warmth and clear storytelling.

VALENTINE / CURIO

Members of Orsino's household.

These characters help establish the world around Orsino and will be incorporated into the wider ensemble.

PRIEST

Appears during the final stages of the story and confirms Olivia and Sebastian's marriage.

OFFICERS

Arrest Antonio following the duel.

The Ensemble

As in all our productions, we want the ensemble to be an important and vital part of the storytelling and atmosphere.

Illyria will be a busy, confusing and exciting place.

There may also be opportunities for ensemble members to contribute through:

- movement;
- physical theatre;
- music;
- singing;
- audience interaction;
- and transitions between scenes.

Some ensemble performers will also take on one or more smaller speaking roles.

If you particularly enjoy ensemble work, please tell us at audition.

A Final Word About Auditioning

Please do not feel that you need to arrive with a completely finished version of a character.

Nor are we looking for someone to reproduce another actor's Malvolio, Viola, Sir Toby or Olivia.

We want to find **our** company and **our** version of these characters.

Come with ideas; be prepared to move; listen to the people you are working with and take risks.

Most importantly, enjoy yourself.

Ruth and Stuart

Directors

Twelfth Night

Hillbark Players 2027