MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING Performance history
In the original production by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, William Kempe played Dogberry and Richard Cowley played Verges. The play was very popular in its early decades, as it would be later: in a poem published in 1640, Leonard Digges wrote "...let but Beatrice / And Benedick be seen, lo in a trice / The Cockpit galleries, boxes, all are full." After the theaters re-opened during the Restoration, Sir William Davenant staged The Law Against Lovers (1662), which inserted Beatrice and Benedick into an adaptation of Measure for Measure. Another adaptation, The Universal Passion, combined Much Ado with a play by Molière (1737). Meanwhile, Shakespeare’s original text had been revived by John Rich at Lincoln’s Inn Fields (1721). David Garrick first played Benedick in 1748, and would continue to play the role till 1776.

The great nineteenth century stage team Henry Irving and Ellen Terry counted Benedick and Beatrice as their greatest tandem triumph, and Charles Kemble also had a great success as Benedick. John Gielgud made Benedick one of his signature roles between 1931 and 1959, playing the part opposite the Beatrice of Diana Wynward, Peggy Ashcroft, and Margaret Leighton.

The longest running Broadway production is A.J. Antoon’s 1972 staging starring Sam Waterston, Kathleen Widdoes and Barnard Hughes, and Derek Jacobi won a Tony Award for playing Benedick in 1984. Jacobi had also played Benedick in the Royal Shakespeare Company’s highly-praised 1982 production. Director Terry Hands produced the play on a stage-length mirror, against an unchanging backdrop of painted trees. Sinéad Cusack played Beatrice.

Much Ado About Nothing (1984)
Director: Stuart Burge Writer: William Shakespeare (play)
BBC Television Production

<table>
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<th>Cast</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee Montague</td>
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<td>Tim Faulkner</td>
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<td>Cherie Lunghi</td>
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<td>Katharine Levy</td>
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<td>Rony Rohr</td>
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<td>Michael Elphick</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clive Dunn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graham Crowden</td>
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<td>Pamela Moiseiwitsch</td>
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<td>Ishia Bennison</td>
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Much Ado About Nothing (1993)

Directed by Kenneth Branagh

Writing credits William Shakespeare (play)  Kenneth Branagh (Screenplay)

Original music by Patrick Doyle

Plot Summary: Young lovers Hero and Claudio are to be married in one week. To pass the time, they conspire with Don Pedro to set a "lover's trap" for Benedick, an arrogant confirmed bachelor, and Beatrice, his favorite sparring partner. Meanwhile, the evil Don John conspires to break up the wedding by accusing Hero of infidelity. In the end, though, it all turns out to be "much ado about nothing."

Cast

Kenneth Branagh .... Benedick  Brian Blessed .... Antonio
Emma Thompson .... Beatrice  Andy Hockley .... George Seacole
Richard Briers .... Signor Leonato  Chris Barnes .... Francis Seacole
Keanu Reeves .... Don John  Conrad Nelson .... Hugh Oatcake
Kate Beckinsale .... Hero  Phyllida Law .... Ursula*
Robert Sean Leonard .... Claudio  Richard Clifford .... Conrade
Denzel Washington .... Don Pedro of Aragon  Gerard Horan .... Borachio
Michael Keaton .... Dogberry  Patrick Doyle .... Balthazar
Imelda Staunton .... Margaret  Ben Elton .... Verges
Jimmy Yuill .... Friar Francis  Edward Jewesbury .... Sexton

*This role was first offered to Judy Dench. Phyllida Law is Emma Thompson’s mother. At the time of the filming, she was Branagh’s mother-in-law. Composer Patrick Doyle is featured as the musician Balthazar.

A REVIEW: Much Ado About Nothing
By Roger Ebert  / May 21, 1993

Ebert Rating: ***

Sunshine and laughter, and merrymakers on a hillside sprinkled with flowers. In the opening scene of "Much Ado About Nothing," Kenneth Branagh insists on the tone the movie will take: These are healthy, joyful young people whose high spirits will survive anything, even the dark double-crosses of Shakespeare’s plot.

The story involves two sets of lovers. The first, Claudio and Hero, are destined to be almost torn apart by the treachery of others. The second, Benedick and Beatrice, are almost kept apart by the treachery of their own hearts. The plot is driven by the kinds of misunderstandings, deceptions and cruel jokes that work only in stage comedy, or perhaps in P. G. Wodehouse, where people are always lurking in the shrubbery, eavesdropping on crucial conversations.

Branagh is nothing if not a film director of high spirits and great energy. His "Henry V" was a Shakespeare history filled with patriotism and poetry. His "Dead Again" hurled headlong into the juiciness of the murder-and-reincarnation genre. His "Peter's Friends" was a reunion of old university chums whose youthful quirks had matured into full-blown eccentricities, for good or ill. That last film, oddly enough, has a tone somewhat in common with "Much Ado About Nothing." The play, set in Sicily and shot in Tuscany, involves a few crucial days in the lives of the followers of Don Pedro (Denzel Washington), Prince of Arragon, who returns victorious from battle with his half-brother Don John (Keanu Reeves). They are now apparently on speaking terms, but Don John, wearing a wicked black beard, mopes about the edges of the screen, casting dark looks upon the merrymakers.

Claudio (Robert Sean Leonard), Don Pedro’s follower, casts eyes on the beautiful Hero (Kate Beckinsale) and is immediately possessed by love. Her eyes reveal that she reciprocates. Meanwhile, the older Benedick (Branagh) and Beatrice (Emma Thompson) feel a powerful attraction, too, but it is expressed through barbed insults and verbal sparring. Sometimes when people are frightened by the love they feel, it comes out through mock hostility.

The film’s action is a progression through a series of picnics, communal bathing, dinners, banquets, dances and courtships. Branagh sets the pace just this side of a Marx Brothers movie. While Benedick and Beatrice do their best to assure that they will never become a couple, the scheming Don John plots to destroy the love that has bloomed for Claudio and Hero. His evil plan involves the use of impostors to convince Claudio that Hero is a wanton woman, unfaithful to him with any man who comes to hand.
A play like "Much Ado About Nothing" is all about style. I doubt if Shakespeare's audiences at the Globe took it any more seriously than we do. It is farce and mime and wisecracks, and dastardly melodrama which all comes right in the end, of course, because this is a Comedy. The key to the film's success is in the acting, especially in the sparks that fly between Branagh and Thompson as their characters aim their insults so lovingly that we realize, sooner than they do, how much they would miss their verbal duets.

Of the others, the actor who tries the hardest, to uncertain effect, is Michael Keaton, as Dogberry, the oafish constable. One of Shakespeare's characters made of low comedy and burlesque, Dogberry here becomes a recycled grotesque modeled on Keaton's performance in "Beetlejuice." Does the approach work? Probably not as Shakespeare, because it seems to come from another universe than the one inhabited by the other characters in the play. But viewed by itself - and Dogberry is after all a self-contained character - it's quite a job of work, and Keaton gets points just for trying so hard.

Any modern film of Shakespeare must deal with the fact that many people in the audience will be unfamiliar with the play, and perhaps even with the playwright. Branagh deals with this fact by making "Much Ado" into a film that reinvents the story; this is not a film "of" a Shakespeare play, but a film that begins with the same materials and the wonderful language and finds its own reality. It is cheerful from beginning to end (since we can hardly take the moments of doom and despair seriously). It is entirely appropriate that it has been released in the springtime.

Written and Directed by Kenneth Branagh
Running Time: 111 Minutes.
Classified PG-13 (For Momentary Sensuality)

**Much Ado About Nothing** (2005, BBC, 90 minutes)

**Director:** Brian Percival  
**Writers:** David Nicholls from the play by William Shakespeare

**Plot Outline:**
Tensions mount in the TV studio when a take-charge anchor is reunited with a man she has a "history" with. When her incompetent TV news co-host is fired, Beatrice winds up working again with Benedict, towards whom she has nothing but disgust. Meanwhile weather girl Hero falls in love with a young man new to the station (much to the dismay of her not-so-secret admirer.) As Bea and Ben trade one-liners, their co-workers tell each that the other is really in love with her/him, which leads them to re-think their own feelings.

**Cast**

Sarah Parish ... Beatrice  
Damian Lewis ... Benedick  
Martin Jarvis ... Leonard  
Olivia Colman ... Ursula  
Tom Ellis ... Claude  
Derek Riddell ... Don  
Patrick Ryecart ... Keith Flemming  
Billie Piper ... Hero  
Nina Sosanya ... Margaret  
Anthony O'Donnell ... Mr. Berry  
Rasmus Hardiker ... Vince  
Michael Smiley ... Peter  
Henrietta Clemett ... Girl
Much Ado About Nothing
2012 - 109 min

A modern retelling of Shakespeare’s classic comedy about two pairs of lovers with different takes on romance and a way with words. Leonato (Clark Gregg), the governor of Messina, is visited by his friend Don Pedro (Reed Diamond) who is returning from a victorious campaign against his rebellious brother Don John (Sean Maher). Accompanying Don Pedro are two of his officers: Benedick (Alexis Denisof) and Claudio (Fran Kranz). While in Messina, Claudio falls for Leonato’s daughter Hero (Jillian Morgese), while Benedick verbally spars with Beatrice (Amy Acker), the governor's niece. The budding love between Claudio and Hero prompts Don Pedro to arrange with Leonato for a marriage. In the days leading up to the ceremony, Don Pedro, with the help of Leonato, Claudio and Hero, attempts to sport with Benedick and Beatrice in an effort to trick the two into falling in love. Meanwhile, the villainous Don John, with the help of his allies Conrade (Riki Lindhome) and Borachio (Spencer Treat Clark), plots against the happy couple, using his own form of trickery to try to destroy the marriage before it begins. A series of comic and tragic events may continue to keep the two couples from truly finding happiness, but then again perhaps love may prevail.

Directed and written for the screen by Joss Whedon
From the play by William Shakespeare

Cast
Amy Acker Beatrice
Alexis Denisof Benedick
Nathan Fillion Dogberry
Clark Gregg Leonato
Reed Diamond Don Pedro
Fran Kranz Claudio
Jillian Morgese Hero
Sean Maher Don John
Spencer Treat Clark Borachio
Riki Lindhome Conrade
Ashley Johnson Margaret
Emma Bates Ursula
Tom Lenk Verges
Nick Kocher First Watchman
Brian McElhaney Second Watchman
STAND I CONDEMNED FOR PRIDE AND SCORN SO MUCH?

CONTEMPT, FAREWELL! AND MAIDEN PRIDE, ADIEU!

BENEDICK, LOVE ON, I WILL REQUIE THEE!

TAMING MY HEART TO THY LOVING HAND.

MY KINDNESS SHALL INCITE THEE TO BIND OUR LOVES UP IN A HOLY BAND.

From the Manga Much Ado About Nothing (2010)