

Measure For Measure

I have read my share of Shakespeare, I have even seen most of the classics live, as well as seen all the modern adaptations on film, so I was surprised to hear that Measure for Measure was a Shakespeare play that I had not heard of. But when I sat down in Freddy Wood Monday night, I was graciously given a companion guide provided by Theatre at UBC that provided some answers as to why this is still a little known play.

It was the last play in a series of comedic structure and major tragedies, that followed the likes of Macbeth and King Lear. But it was the play's crassness and overt sexuality that brought it out of favour until it was rediscovered and has become ever more popular since the 1950s. This play, with all its potential, leaves you wanting to know more about Measure for Measure, and how it has been interpreted elsewhere, but beyond the strength of the play was this casts' strong performances.

The Duke, played by Jason Nicola, is the catalyst of the story. He decides, in an attempt to better understand himself and the city he governs, to bestow his power on an other and leaves town for awhile. But he returns disguised as a Friar, and plays with peoples emotions and intents as part of his social experiment. Nicola most excelled during his long soliloquies where his skill with delivery and timing were most noticeable. His ability to handle the Shakespearian speech allowed his lines to flow, and sound as though there were meant to be heard- like poetry.

Another standout was Kerry Alchin who played the villain Angelo. At first, he allows you admire his staunch respect for

the law, but then you witness his internal struggle between lust and propriety, until finally he embraces the corruption and you become aware of the irony of the situation. He is about to put a man to death for pre-marital sex, but offers a virgin the ability to set him free if she will be his mistress. While you might pity Allchin's character in the beginning, he convinces you to accept his vileness and ungraciousness.

Jess Watson was given the role of Isabella, virgin and sister to the condemned Claudio. She does a great job of mixing naiveness with righteousness. Her struggle is between the value of her brothers life, and her reputation- or as she puts it- his life for her soul. Her appeals to Angelo are convincing, and you can physically watch her

struggle. Watson is asked often by the role to use silence as a tool, and she pulls it off without being awkward.

My personal favorite, was Lucio, played by Mike Griffin. The character is used by Shakespeare for a multitude of plot advancements and as a foil to main character development, but his best quality is his sarcasm, arrogance, and general 'over-the-topness'. Griffin take the character to the limit, casually stressing jokes, using well timed gesters and keep the audience in stitches with sexual innuendo. This role has the potential to carry or sink the play, and Griffin manages to keep well within the boundaries of his role, while still adding magnitudes to the overall production.

A few other notables include

Helenna Santos, who steals the stage at the beginning of the second act with a beautifully sung solo which goes unaccompanied by music. She plays Mariana who is pinning for her dead brother and trying to cope being cast of by her love, Angelo.

Other great scenes include the introduction of Elbow, Matthew Thiessen, with great physical humor; the arrest of Froth and Pompey, Chris Coe and Joel Redmond, which has excellent physical acting; Claudio's, Mike Waterman, turnaround and betrayal of his sister; and finally, Dick Chow's Provost, who excellent acting brings you into his characters personal struggle.

Overall the play was fantastic. Although some people might shy away from Shakespeare because of the language, I would highly recommend this rendition of Measure for Measure, since the language does not seem to play an impeding part. There is no need for thorough understanding of Shakespearian English because the actors are so comfortable with their lines that they come off as natural speech patterns. Their physical accompaniment- pauses, looks, gestures- are so appropriate and well places that it gives more meaning to the dialogue and helps to keep the storyline clear.

The production plays nightly at 730pm at Freddy Wood Theatre until Sunday.

Tickets are available at the boxoffice during office hours, or they open again at 630pm. Tickets are only \$10 for students and seniors, \$18 for others.



Robin Mooney as Mistress Overdone converses with Joel Redmond, the comic Pompey.



Kerry Alchin as Angelo, and Jess Watson as Isabella, during the indecent proposal.

Photos from Tim Matheson



Robin Mooney struggles between a guard and Dick Chow as the Provost.