

# THE UBYSSEY

## UBC theatre measures up

MEASURE FOR MEASURE at the Frederic Wood Theatre until Nov. 22  
by Sarah Bourdon/culture staff

The plays of William Shakespeare have captured the hearts and minds of audiences for over four centuries. Stage and film interpretations of his works are abundant, and not surprisingly have fallen into both the good and bad performance categories. The UBC theatre program's production of "Measure for Measure" is one of the good ones. Very good, actually. Granted, I am no expert, having only seen a few of Shakespeare's plays on stage. However, the performance, which premiered on November 12, is wonderfully entertaining, well acted and definitely worth seeing.

"Measure for Measure" is a comedy, though as with most Shakespearean comedies, it has a dark side underneath the witty banter and wild antics of its characters.

In this particular tale, we meet the Duke of Vienna, who is in the midst of a decision to leave his post. Jason Nicola, whose energetic, flawless performance is the most outstanding of the cast, plays the Duke. Nicola has a powerful voice, highly suited to the brilliance and complexity of Shakespeare's dialogue (and lacking only in British accent). He shows versatility in portraying both the Duke and the Friar, a disguise the Duke adopts for most of the play.

The Duke decides to leave his deputy, Angelo, in charge of Vienna while he is gone. Angelo, played by a very well-cast Kerry Allchin, is not the virtuous man the Duke believes him to be. As soon as the Duke departs, Angelo mercilessly sentences a man named Claudio to death. Claudio's sister, a nun-to-be named Isabella, rushes to his rescue, only to find the price to free him is much higher than she is willing to pay. The chaos and intrigue that ensues provides much laughter, along with a deeper examination of the discrepancy between justice and human conscience.

This particular production, directed by the department of theatre's Gerry Mackay, captures both the overlying humour and serious elements, making for a well-balanced, entertaining tale. There are some truly hilarious moments, provided largely by two talented actors—Mike Griffin, who plays Lucio, and Joel Redmond, who plays Pompey. Lucio's flamboyance and his penchant for random high-pitched vocalisations, and Pompey's strangely charming willingness to learn the art of human execution, provide moments of comic relief.

The more sombre scenes are made profound by the convincing performance of Jess Watson as Isabella. Watson beautifully portrays the strife and conflict felt by Isabella, most notably in one intense scene where she relentlessly argues with Angelo to convince him to spare her brother's life.

The choice to stage the story in late 19th century Vienna is made realistic by the costumes, and the mannerisms put forth by the actors. By changing the time period, the director steers away from a strictly traditional depiction of Shakespeare, but keeps the play within the realm of believability. The sets are uncomplicated but creative, especially the choice of imposing images, such as Gustav Klimt's famous painting, "The Kiss," onto the stage backdrops.

One shortcoming of the production, however, is the opportunities for comedy that are missed by some of the actors in the first half of the play. Since the literal meaning of lines in Shakespeare's plays are sometimes lost on the audience, the delivery of the line, including tone of voice and body language, becomes essential in conveying its message. Several of the actors in the play are very skilled at presenting their lines in ways that give the audience a greater appreciation of the humour, but several others could deliver their lines more expressively to illustrate the comedy that is present. UBC Theatre's "Measure for Measure" is fantastic, fun and well worth an evening's outing.