

Shakespeare and Company, Lenox, MA
Measure for Measure, by William Shakespeare. Directed by Alice Reagan.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?”



Charles Sedgwick Hall, Ally Farzetta, Rory Hammond, David Gow,
Nehassaiu deGannes, Ariel Bock; Photo: Daniel Rader

In their fine tradition Shakespeare and Company’s modernized “Measure for Measure” has cross-dressed their actresses in multiple roles, even their leading lady, Isabella, played beautifully by Nehassaiu deGannes doubles as Pompey, a man who manipulates the other characters to his own advantage, exactly the opposite of Isabella, who has joined a convent for its separation from worldly things and other people. Ariel Bock plays the Duke (referred to as “She”) who ultimately disguises herself as a priest (“He”). Rory Hammond plays Escalus, a magistrate, as a woman but then turns into Abhorson, a male executioner. And so it goes.

Alice Reagan has directed this production, reset in the Vienna section of Harlem in the 1950s. The setting, well-designed by Edward T. Morris, is distinctly urban and dark; jazz, including a song by Billie Holiday, peppers the play. The show is well-lit by Marika Kent and the costumes do take us to the ‘50s, designed to perfection by Govane Lohbauer. Sound designer Caroline Eng has done a great job on this show. Hope Rose Kelly, the stage manager, kept the show running like a German train, right on schedule without a single mistake.

The play is about morality and living with legal restrictions imposed by the Duke who is hoping to find someone to ultimately replace himself in town. She has designated Angelo, played by the elegant David Gow, to be her successor, but she discovers that he is abusing



Rory Hammond as Abhorson,
Nehassaiu deGannes as Pompey;
Photo: Daniel Rader

his power. Isabella's brother, Claudio, has been accused of immorality and condemned to die and much of the play is about getting his sentence reversed. Claudio is played by Vaughn Pole who handles Shakespeare's language well and gives a very convincing performance. Indika Senanayake takes the role of the prostitute Mistress Overdone and three other roles and gives as good as she gets from the law as well as from Lucio, the mastermind of many convoluted plots, played with wonderful panache by Charls Sedgwick Hall. Ally Farzetta plays Claudio's pregnant fiancée and a nun and the Provost and is quite moving in her final scenes.

Like so many of Shakespeare's comedies this play has a lot of difficulties in its convoluted plotting and the script demands your attention every moment. There are only a few famous quotes to listen for, but the language is somewhat more poetic than, say, "The Comedy of Errors." It probably takes as long to relate the story of this show as it takes to play it, but if you pay attention, and Reagan's staging of the show helps you do that, you'll get it and you'll enjoy what you see and hear, just don't expect the straightforward humor of other Shakespeare comedies. This one is funny with a very dark side, emphasized by the production. It should be pointed out that though this production is set in Harlem, it is not a Black show. It is much more a contemporary setting than it is a 1950s concept.



Indika Senanayake
as Mistress Overdone,
Charls Sedgwick Hall as Lucio;
Photo: Daniel Rader



David Gow as Angelo, Ally Farzetta as Provost,
Nehassaiu deGannes as Isabella, Charls Sedgwick Hall
as Lucio; Photo: Daniel Rader

The players here are so good at what they do that the play emerges as something fresh and new. DeGannes is particularly fine, and has quick costume changes, as she negotiates Pompey and Isabella. She alone is worth the price of admission and the time commitment you have to make for this play.

+ 08/21/2022 +

Measure for Measure plays in the Tina Packer Playhouse at Shakespeare and Company, 70 Kemble Street, Lenox, MA through September 18. For information and

tickets, call the box office at 413-637-1199 or go to their website at www.shakespeare.org.