

Thursday  
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## Arts Listings

## UC Theater Department Stages Bard's 'Measure for Measure'

By Ken Bullock Special to the Planet  
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"All difficulties are but easy when they are known." This line from Measure for Measure is like a key to The Bard's comedies—and maybe comedy in general. Howard Hawks, who pioneered the screwball comedy on screen, said the difference between comedy and drama was one of perspective: in drama, obstacles are to be overcome; in comedy, they're embarrassing roadblocks (or banana peels on the road), getting in the way of what's desired, making the seeker look ridiculous.

In Shakespeare's comedies, the difficulties (many due to ignorance, of self and others) are resolved in marriage, justice, a communal enlightenment. In his tragedies, the realization is one of a communal mourning.

Peter Glazer has directed a spare, elegant Measure for Measure in the Zellerbach Playhouse for the UC Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies. Both the comedy and the serious issues that play with and jeopardize the protagonists are rendered clearly in this version featuring both students and more seasoned performers.

Measure for Measure isn't played quite as much as, say, The Merchant of Venice, which also deals with justice and corruption, with a comparable storyline. Maybe something of the theological edge of meaning which pervades the story, and of the cruelty (maybe rigor is a better word, in Leonardo Da Vinci's sense: Obstinate Rigor, his motto) of justice in a hierarchial society, where the law has cosmic significance and must uphold the heavens in every judgment, is incomprehensible or unpalatable to contemporary audiences.

The Duke of Vienna gives over the reins of government to two gentlemen he deems incorruptible—then he pretends to go away, all the while observing them, disguised in the habit of a friar. A novice in a convent, the sister of a man condemned to death for impregnating his fiancée, pleads with one of the deputies for her brother's life and receives the obvious proposition. She believes her brother would die to protect her chastity. (Perhaps it's an incomprehension of codes of honor and the hierarchies which sustain them that lend this difficulty today—and the theater of the Baroque is fixed on honor and majesty. As Orson Welles said, "The problem with playing Shakespeare in America is, to an American, a king is a gentleman wearing a crown.")

Misunderstandings abound, all to be dissipated on the Duke's triumphal return—or self-unmasking. But first there are a few hard words and hard knocks. And somebody's head has to roll.

Measure for Measure boasts an unusual gaggle of clowns, with Pompey ("servant to Mistress Overdone") the chief one, rendered by Drew Ledbetter and Daniel Desmarais in black and shades as Lucio, "a Fantastic." Froth, "a foolish gentleman," is portrayed by Ricardo Salcido. Benedict N. Tuffnell makes an impression as Barnadine, "a dissolute prisoner," condemned to death. The aptly named Abhorson, a headsman, is played with relish by Nicholas S. LoCicero.

Reya Sehgal is appealing as Isabella, loyal sister and novice, and as Mariana, Lyndsy Kail plays an abandoned fiancée, part of the solution to the conundrum. Will Austin as the disguised Duke gains in strength throughout the play, and Ken Jensen shows the magnanimity as "ancient lord" Escalus his fellow deputy, Angelo (Carl Holvick-Thomas) lacks.

Melpomene Katakalos designed the spare set, lit by David K. H. Elliott, and the costumes, a mix of traditional with a swathe of various modern fashions, are by Caitlin Kagawa.

Identities change; there's a mortal substitution; the tone swings from dire to wry. "We must not make a scarecrow of the law" contrasts readily enough with the executioner's cheery politeness: "Your friend, sir, the hangman. If you would be so good as to rise and be put to death." What a way to wake up! As the clown echoes, "And sleep afterward!"

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