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"Measure for Measure" at Town Hall Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Some of the cast of Measure for Measure Photos Stu Selland

A sometimes overlooked play because of its dubious nature as a comedy or a drama, Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure" is the new production of Lafayette's local troupe, Town Hall Theater Company. The production's director, Chris Hayes, who proposed the play to THT's artistic director Clive Worsley, created a very lively interpretation of the masterpiece, supported by a group of young talent and situated in the not-too-distant future - a convincing way to shake-off Shakespeare.

"Measure for Measure" is a transitional play for Shakespeare, said Hayes during one of the final THT rehearsals. "It closes his comedy series and announces the dramas that ensued. But it is still a comedy." The underlying themes of the play, however, are serious ones.

The overarching theme of the play and Hayes' vision is the concept of power. "What is the role of government? Should it address moral/sexual behavior? In the play, most of the moral challenges revolve around sex, with the crux of the dynamic being the decision of Isabella to place more value in her own virginity (equated to the salvation of her soul) than to the life of her brother. Sex might just be reduced to a lever of power," said the director. "Justice and

power come head to head in this play; the character of the Duke has the oddest sense of justice. It works out, but his methods are insane."

The dark and complex questions that the characters have to answer are lightened by Shakespeare's comedic tactics. The moments of dramatic soul searching quickly end with the introduction of deception, disguises, cases of mistaken identity, twists and turns with multiple plots, and amusing sub-plots that lighten the mood.

The happy ending is a bit ambiguous; the play ends with multiple marriages - or does it? "It's a 'truth-comedy,'" said Hayes. "There are some dark moments and some light ones. We don't bring comedy into the dark moments, we bring [comedy] around it."

Hayes, who is also an actor - twice in a "Measure for Measure" production - said that he chose a younger cast to bring a freshness and lightness to the play. "I wanted to have people on the front edge of this experience offering something new," he said. "For example, the character of Lucio is a 'no good' character, and Damien Seteri proposed a very likeable version of the character that's completely relevant and I had never seen before."

During the run-through a few days before opening night, the cast had the play under control, the beautiful language rolling off their tongues, with high energy emanating from the stage.

Joel Roster highlights the self-examination of his character and his complex nature as a menacing and troubled Angelo; Anya Kazimierski plays a bit rigid, yet strong and passionate Isabella, as the role demands; Hayes thought a woman would be great in the role of the older man, Escalus, and Lauren Spencer adds humanity to the duo she forms with Angelo; Steve Rhyne makes the ambiguous Duke Vincentio a very likeable character, although he causes all the turmoil, yet his good-natured efforts to solve everything wins the day; and Clive Worsley plays Pompey with his usual wit and precision, a role that's not central to the intrigue, but pivotal to set the mood on stage.

"I asked Clive to play Pompey so I could go into it knowing that he has a really good grasp of the language," said Hayes, "I wanted to be relaxed knowing that was taken care of."

Overall, "Measure for Measure" is, as its title suggests, a message of tolerance. The play's title comes from a biblical passage (Matthew 7: 1-2) which suggests we should not be quick to judge others, because nobody is perfect and everyone is subject to God's judgment - a message definitely relevant today.

"Measure for Measure" runs from May 25 to June 15, with previews on May 23 and 24. It is rated PG for some suggestive moments. For tickets, call (925) 283-1557 or visit www.TownHallTheatre.com.

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" also at THT

As an interesting counterpoint to "Measure for Measure," Campolindo High School drama students are presenting Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" May 29 and 30 at Town Hall Theatre. The play re-interprets Shakespeare's "Hamlet" from the point of view of two minor characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This semester the regular program could not take place at Campolindo, so the students took it upon themselves to create the play with no supervision. They call themselves the Ouroboros Players and senior Mina Arasteh was chosen as the director. "I wanted to be in the play, but I was the one with most direction experience since I had been the assistant director of two plays," she said. The students had to find costumes and build their props. "Town Hall Theatre gave us a lot of costumes," said Arasteh. The students have rehearsed four days a week after school and on

weekends in other's back yards since February. "We've had a lot of fun and I think we are putting together something really good," said student actor Justin Archangel. Drew Jackson and Kyle Merriman play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, giving the two characters the absurd humor and desperate awkwardness that made the play such an icon of modern theater. On the sidelines, Arasteh gives the final touch. "We will play only twice and it has been an enormous amount of work," says the senior, who will study environmental law next year at UC Davis, "but what counts is the process. Everybody is so talented and we've done something wonderful together." Tickets are \$10 for students and \$15 for adults, and will help the students pay for their costs, including the licensing fee. Visit www.townhalltheatre.com/special-events for more info and to make reservations. S. Braccini



Anya Kazimierski (Isabella)



Student-actors rehearsing Photo Sophie Braccini

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