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## A forceful 'Measure For Measure' closes CalShakes' 2017 season

By Sophie Braccini

CalShakes ends its 2017 season in the Bruns outdoor theater with the enduring 1604 play by William Shakespeare, "Measure For Measure." The play is set in Vienna, where the ruler, Duke, decides to delegate all his powers to his deputy, Angelo, while he pretends to hiatus, but Duke's real intent is for Angelo, whom he trusts, to restore moral order in Vienna, while he in fact stays in Vienna under a friar's disguise. Emboldened by his new sense of power and convinced of his own moral rectitude, Angelo cracks down on vice: he orders brothels closed and decides to make an example of Claudio by condemning him to death for having impregnated his betrothed before marriage. When Claudio's sister, Isabella, a maiden intending to become a nun, comes to beg for mercy, Angelo is gripped by lust and demands that she give up her virginity to him in order to save her brother.

Tyne Rafaeli directed the play for CalShakes. She took the 17th century play and stripped it of its courtly good manners, giving it a sharp edge - loud and violent, filled with noise, movement and colors. Everything screams at the spectator. The scene where Angelo tells Isabella that in order to save her brother, she will have to give herself to him is led with forceful violence. Actors who are able to embody such troubling emotions are to be highly praised; one wonders how they can come out unaffected.

The text speaks of violence, but when he wrote the play Shakespeare had to soften it somewhat, to make sure King James I, his patron, would approve of it. The violence in the staging here is pedagogic; it uses 21st century body language and physical broad presence to express what Shakespeare said 400 years ago: power corrupts, sexual harassment is an easy temptation to those who have the influence and good reputation - and it is easy to blame it on the victim. The play shows how convenient it is for the powerful to punish others' sins while secretly partaking in the same turpitudes. And how forgiveness and mercy have the power to heal.

Rafaeli and her actors did magnify the farcical aspects of this comedy, with secondary characters providing a pleasant respite in between some of the more dramatic moments.

Adam Schroeder as Lucio has a unique and funny stage presence, magnified by his bleached hair and extreme punk outfit. Annie Worden embodies a series of disjointed characters: as Barnadine, she has just one short appearance, but it is so over the top, rising from what seems to be the inferno and spreading havoc on stage with a mixture of physical power and sex appeal; as Elbow, she shows a great mastery of slapstick art.

Lindsay Rico as Isabella and David Graham Jones as Angelo are the central duo of the play. Rafaeli chose to dress her in a long white robe, and him in a black military uniform, reminiscent of fascism. The black stocking and silver heels that complete Isabella's outfit add an interesting element of contrast and disruption. At first glance, she is whole and unwavering, but she does not hesitate to send another woman in her place to do what she would not.

Angelo, the archetypal villain, is a deceitful liar, however his very last words are those of redemption. His punishing acts on others' lust may well be because of his own repressed desires. The act of mercy bestowed upon him at the end seems to redeem him at last. He confronts his demons, and accepts that he is no better than everybody else.

During the illuminating CalShakes' pre-talk, Dr. Philippa Kelly explained that the title of the play came from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew 7:1-2. Kelly noted that the phrase is still relevant and applicable to today's leaders.

This is a piece of theater not to be missed.

"Measure for Measure" runs through Oct. 8. For ticket information, visit [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org).

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