

ASC: The Merchant of Venice 2008



It hasn't been too long since the [American Shakespeare Center](#)'s last production of [The Merchant of Venice](#). But here it is again, and they do a terrific job with it.

The first thing that stands out is the staging. Because the company that has taken up residence at the Blackfriars Playhouse for a couple of months has been on the road with this show for some time, the production is designed to be performed in any space. The actors spend the entire play on-stage, entering and exiting the action from benches placed around the edge of the scene. Considering that at the Blackfriars there are generally 12 audience stools on-stage as well, this makes for a crowded set. But this works, and it speeds up the play.

The next thing I noticed was Christopher Seiler as Shylock. I remember him as being very funny in other shows over the years he's been involved in the ASC, but Shylock is the most unfunny character in Shakespeare. And Seiler does a great job. Scot Carson as Antonio and Josh Carpenter as Bassanio also stand out, but really there are no weak spots in the whole play.

And a last note: The ASC is known for its music. They cast actors who can sing and play instruments not only during the show but in pre-show and interlude entertainment. Some actors are better than others when it comes to the music but in this troupe there are some great ones. Chris Johnston, whom I remember well from last year, is a fantastic singer and guitar player. New to the company is Alisa Ledyard, who has a very special voice. She's trained in musical theater, and that shows.

This is an excellent production. If you haven't seen "Merchant" lately, or even if you have, check this one out.

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