

# ASC: Measure for Measure 2008



*Measure for Measure* may not end in quite the way you remember. In some productions, Isabella rejects the Duke; in some, she accepts his advances. In some, such as the current **American Shakespeare Center** production at the Blackfriars Playhouse, which takes its cues from the First Folio's stage directions, the ending is more ambiguous: does she choose the church, or does she go with the Duke? It seems that the audience is left to decide for themselves what the outcome should be. This ambiguity is not what we're used to in our Shakespeare, but it does provoke thought. See the **Director's Notes** for more.

The story begins when Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna, takes a trip, leaving Angelo in charge. Angelo, a self-righteous zealot, sentences young Claudio to death for fornication with Juliet. Word of the sentence gets to Claudio's sister, Isabella, who comes to Angelo to persuade him to be lenient. Meanwhile, the Duke hasn't really left town and takes on the disguise of a friar so that he can observe Angelo's behavior and the reaction of the people. None of which would be terribly interesting except that Angelo falls in love with Isabella and, revealing a flaw in his character, tries to seduce her. Angelo and Isabella both believe that Claudio has been executed, but the audience is in on the Duke's prior arrangement with the Provost to execute some miscreant in his place, so that the truth can come out in the end and produce a happy, ambiguous ending.

There are plenty of wonderful performances in this production. John Pasha is mostly excellent as the Duke and René Thornton, Jr. makes a solid Angelo. **Sarah Fallon's Isabella is outstanding, and the scene in which Angelo makes his intentions known to Isabella is a very powerful, intense moment, with Thornton and Fallon engaged in a very believable battle that leaves the audience gasping.** The role of Claudio is not large, although the play revolves around his deed and fate, but Gregory Jon Phelps does a great job with the part. In this production, after the intermission, he comes on stage with a guitar and sings Billy Joel's "Only the Good Die Young," which fits nicely with the play's storyline—and he's got a fine voice, besides. (When Phelps appeared with the guitar last night, one audience member shouted out "Captain Tempest"—an allusion to Phelps's role in ASC's production a couple of years ago of *Return to the Forbidden Planet*; that got a chuckle out of Phelps.) There's also plenty of comedy in this play, provided in this production by James Keegan's prancing clown Pompey (and the scene where the Provost assigns him to assist the burly executioner, played by Thomas Keegan, is hilarious), by Allison Glenzer's brash Mistress Overdone, and especially by Lucio, played wonderfully and foppishly by the always-funny John Harrell.

The three current productions at the Blackfriars (*Measure for Measure*, *King Lear*, *Twelfth Night*), plus *Richard II*, which opens in September, run through mid-December. They're all worth seeing, more than once if you can

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