



## Production Notice

# ***The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice* at the Shakespeare Company, Calgary**

by Clifford Werier. Published in 2019 Issue 1.

For the productions: *The Tempest* (2019, Shakespeare Company). *The Merchant of Venice* (2019, Shakespeare Company). See production details at the end of the review.

CALGARY'S **THE SHAKESPEARE COMPANY** HAS BEEN MOUNTING A FULL SEASON OF PROFESSIONAL Shakespeare and related plays since 1995. Currently led by artistic director Haysam Kadri, the 2019–2020 season featured three Shakespeare plays, including *The Tempest* (September 19–October 5, 2019) and *The Merchant of Venice* (November 28–December 8, 2019), mounted in partnership with the University of Calgary School of Creative and Performing Arts, and a now-cancelled “Roulette Shakespeare” production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, meant to run from May 14–May 31, 2020, in which casting was to be based on the spin of a roulette wheel.



Figure 1. David Haysom, Jamie Konchak, Jaden Sullivan, Amy On, Avital Fertel, Sarah Wheeldon, and Roger LeBlanc in *The Merchant of Venice*. Set and costume design by Jennifer Lee Arsenault (MFA'14), and lighting design by Narda McCarroll. Photo credit: Tim Nguyen.

*The Tempest*, directed by Jamie Dunsdon, was produced at the company's usual venue, the intimate Studio at [Vertigo Theatre](#), arranged with audience bleachers on three sides. In keeping with the company's tradition of two-hour Shakespeare with a brief interval, the production moved at a sprightly pace that often sacrificed clear elocution for dizzying speediness.

The company's commitment to equitable casting was evident, especially in the roles of Prospera (Shawna Burnett), Ariel (Alice Wordsworth), Sebastiana (Brianna Johnston), and Gonzala (Valerie Ann Pearson).

Shawna Burnett's Prospera was the most problematic feature of this production, as her performance carried a single emotion throughout the play: simmering and exploding anger. Certainly, questions of anger and forgiveness are at the heart of the play, as Prospero manages both the events on the island and his complex feelings, but this Prospera had only one response to almost everything: to be angry or angrier. Even at the decisive moment when she drowns her magic book, you get the feeling that she would also like to rip out the pages and stomp on the binding. Likewise, her continual torture of Caliban felt particularly sadistic, as she happily gave him extra jabs of her staff-like cattle prod for good measure. Burnett's Prospera also showed very little tenderness toward Miranda, nor did the sweet, fairy-like Ariel fare much better in attracting her mistress's sympathy.

While the comic chemistry of Trinculo and Stephano worked well, the spidery, monstrous Caliban who groveled and lurched over the stage was so oppressed, miserable, and undignified that he failed to generate any sympathy, despite his beautiful descriptions of the island's magical properties. This was in keeping with the general humourlessness of the production, as Prospera's toxic clouds of rage seemed to permeate everything.

*The Merchant of Venice*, produced at the University of Calgary's [Reeve Theatre](#), featured a mixed cast of professional actors and students. It was a treat to see Seana McKenna as Shylock, as she is one of the most experienced and lauded actors in Canada, having worked as an actor, director and teacher for 40 years, including 27 seasons at the [Stratford Festival](#).

From the moment she walked on stage, McKenna's Shylock expressed a range of conflicting emotions with her body



Figure 2. Avital Fertel and Jaden Sullivan in *the Merchant of Venice*. Photo credit: Tim Nguyen.

language and subtle facial gestures. While she communicated deep reserves of anger from a lifetime of abuse, outwardly she expressed both dignity and intelligence. In other words, watching McKenna's Shylock was like attending a masterclass in Shakespearean acting: the audience hung on every word because the delivery was so profoundly believable.

The power of McKenna's Shylock was the production's best feature but also created a significant contrast between her professionalism and the amateur quality of some of the student actors. To this end, Avital Fertel's Jessica and Jaden Sullivan's Lorenzo were particularly problematic, as their delivery had the usual problems associated with students who are learning the craft of speaking Shakespeare. While Jessica and Lorenzo are never easy parts because they are so unsympathetic, in this production they lacked any erotic connection or playfulness. And this same problem of contrasting abilities extended throughout, as the experienced professionals — such as Jamie Konchak's charming and vivacious Portia — nailed their parts, while the students often struggled with delivery.

## **Links**

Reeve Theatre. <https://asc.ucalgary.ca/building/reeve-theatre/>.

The Shakespeare Company. <https://www.shakespearecompany.com/>.

Stratford Festival. <https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/>.

Vertigo Theatre. <https://www.vertigotheatre.com/>.

## Production Details

### General

<i>Title</i>	<i>The Tempest</i>
<i>Year</i>	2019
<i>Theatre Company</i>	The Shakespeare Company
<i>Theatre</i>	The Studio at Vertigo Theatre
<i>Start Date</i>	September 19, 2019
<i>End Date</i>	October 5, 2019

### Cast

PROSPERA	SHAWNA BURNETT
STEFANO	ALEXANDER ARIATE
MIRANDA	ANNA DALGLEISH
ALONSO	MYRON DEARDEN
SPRITE	EMMA FLEMING
FERDINAND	DANIEL FONG
FRANCISCO	CALEB GORDON
SEBASTIANA	BRIANNA JOHNSTON
ANTONIO	DEVIN MACKINNON
CALIBAN	JONATHAN MOLINSKI
SPRITE	ROBYN NEUMANN
GONZALA	VALERIE ANN PEARSON
TRINCULO	MICHAEL ROLFE
BOATSWAIN	SPENCER STREICHERT
ARIEL	ALICE WORDSWORTH

### Creatives

DIRECTOR	JAMIE DUNSDON
SET AND LIGHTING	NARDA MCCARROLL
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	KIANA WU
COSTUME DESIGN	VICTORIA KRAWCHUK
SOUND DESIGN & COMPOSITION	CHAD BLAIN
CHOREOGRAPHER	KUNJI IKEDA
STAGE MANAGER	MILLIE WINZINOWICH
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	JENNIFER YEUNG

PRODUCTION MANAGER

AJAY BADONI

TEXT & VOCAL COACH

JANE MACFARLANE

## General

<i>Title</i>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
<i>Year</i>	2019
<i>Theatre Company</i>	The Shakespeare Company
<i>Theatre</i>	The Reeve Theatre
<i>Start Date</i>	November 28, 2019
<i>End Date</i>	December 8, 2019

## Cast

PRINCE OF MOROCCO

AJ ANWAR

LAUNCELOT GOBBO

ALEXANDER ARIATE

PRINCE OF ARRAGON, DUKE OF VENICE

JOEL COCHRANE

TUBAL

MYRON DEARDEN

JESSICA

AVITAL FERTEL

ANTONIO

DEAN PAUL GIBSON

BASSANIO

DAVID HAYSOM

PORTIA

JAMIE KONCHAK

GRATIANO

ROGER LEBLANC

SALANIO

MACKENZIE McDONALD

SHYLOCK

SEANA MCKENNA

SALARINO

JOSH OLSON

STEPHANIA

AMY ON

LEONARDO

BARRY OWEN

LORENZO

JADEN SULLIVAN

NERISSA

SARAH WHEELDON

## Creatives

DIRECTOR

CAREY PERLOFF

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

JENNIFER LEE ARSENAULT

LIGHTING DESIGNER

NARDA MCCARROLL

SOUND DESIGN & COMPOSITION

PETER MOLLER

TEXT & VOCAL COACH

JANE MACFARLANE

ASSISTANT SET, COSTUME & PROPS DESIGNER

ELIZABET RAJCHEL