

Production Notice

***The Merchant of Venice* at the Utah Shakespeare Festival**

by Jim Volz. Published in 2018 Issue 1.

For the production: *The Merchant of Venice* (2018, Utah Shakespeare Festival). Performance attended: 2018-08-14. See production details at the end of the notice.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE HAS OFTEN RILED AUDIENCES, CRITICS, AND CONTEMPORARY HUMAN RIGHTS activists for its anti-Semitism, its less-than-Christian approach to inclusiveness, and its troubling onstage world of bitterness, taunting, and gross family and financial politics. In a Summer 2018 production that could be ripped from the headlines of Fox News, [Utah Shakespeare Festival](#) director Melinda Pfundstein lets the words carry the day and allows the audiences to make all the obvious connections to America's current divisiveness, legal atrocities, financial disasters, and relationship woes.



Figure 1. Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2018.

A powerful performance by veteran actor Lisa Wolpe as Shylock certainly sets the pace for a rich telling of the story and a hilarious turn by Geoffrey Kent as the Prince of Arragon adds some welcome comic relief to the generally bitter story of disastrous money-lending, romance and fortune seeking gone sour. Ms. Wolpe's Shylock—nuanced, logical, and hard-hitting—befuddles concerned citizens and lawmakers alike.

Pfundstein has a steady hand and carefully blends transitions, lilting music, humor, and pathos while allowing the action to unfold and march on to its inevitable, if not always surprising, conclusion.

Knowing that most of the Utah Shakespeare Festival audience members know the plot, Pfundstein doesn't succumb to the melodrama of Shylock's demand for the execution of his bond, Jessica's abandonment of her father, the lovers' loss of their rings, or the suitors' ill-fated selections of all that glitters.

Apollo Mark Weaver's simple, yet clever set design allows the action to move quickly and freely on stage. Bill Black's costumes are interesting, character-defining, and wonderfully fun when the occasion calls for it. Michael Pasquini's lighting design adeptly manages the Englestad Shakespeare Theatre's outdoor daytime-to-sunset realities while creating mood and clarity. Sound designer Joe Payne and Music Director Brandon Scott Grayson combine forces to create a unique world for Venice.

The Merchant of Venice was the highlight of the season for this reviewer, who also attended *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *An Iliad*, and *Big River* making for a diverse and sometimes spellbinding weekend of repertory in one of America's premiere Shakespeare Festivals.

Links

Utah Shakespeare Festival. <https://www.bard.org/>

Production Details

General

<i>Title</i>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
<i>Year</i>	2018
<i>Theater Company</i>	Utah Shakespeare Festival
<i>Theater</i>	Engelstad Shakespeare Theatre
<i>Start Date</i>	2018-06-30
<i>End Date</i>	2018-09-07

Cast

ANTONIO	LESLIE BROTT
SALARINO	KYLE BULLOCK
SOLANIO	TY FANNING
BASSANIO	WAYNE T. CARR
GRATIANO	JOSH INNERST
LORENZO	JOSH JEFFERS
SALERIO	KEATON DELMAR JOHNS
STEPHANO	PAUL MICHAEL SANDBERG
PORTIA	TARAH FLANAGAN
NERISSA	BETSY MUGAVERO
BALTHAZAR	MICHAEL ELICH
SHYLOCK	LISA WOLPE
JESSICA	AIDAA PEERZADA
LANCELET GOBBO	ISABELLA ABEL-SUAREZ
TUBAL	TRACIE LANE
PRINCE OF MOROCCO	JAMIL ZRAIKAT
PRINCE OF ARRAGON	GEOFFREY KENT
SINGERS	KEATON DELMAR JOHNS, COURTNEY McMULLIN
DUKE OF VENICE	TRACIE LANE
MAGNIFICOS	GEOFFREY KENT, JAMIL ZRAIKAT
ENSEMBLE	SARA FUNK, CHAD HENWOOD, KEATON DELMAR JOHNS, COURTNEY McMULLIN

Creatives

DIRECTOR	MELINDA PFUNDSTEIN
SCENIC DESIGNER	APOLLO MARK WEAVER
COSTUME DESIGNER	BILL BLACK
LIGHTING DESIGNER	MICHAEL PASQUINI

SOUND DESIGNER

JOE PAYNE

MUSIC DIRECTOR

BRANDON SCOTT GRAYSON

DRAMATURG

ISABEL SMITH-BERNSTEIN

VOICE AND TEXT COACH

JEREMY SORTORE

FIGHT DIRECTOR

GEOFFREY KENT

MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

MEGAN BRUNSVOLD MERCEDES

STAGE MANAGER

BRYAN SOMMER