



BOB JONES UNIVERSITY
**CONCERT, OPERA
& DRAMA SERIES**

P R E S E N T S

The University Classic Players
in

William Shakespeare's

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Directed and designed by Jeffrey Stegall

Lighting design by Richard Streeter

Music by Kenon Renfrow

THE CHARACTERS

THE MERCHANT & HIS FRIENDS

Antonio, a merchant of Venice.....	Jeffrey Stegall
Bassanio, his friend and suitor to Portia.....	Benjamin Nicholas
Other friends of Antonio and Bassanio	
Gratiano.....	Nathan Young
Salerio.....	Cameron Smith
Salanio.....	Seth Sanders
Lorenzo, in love with Jessica.....	Wilbur Mauk
The Duke of Venice.....	Brad Payne

SHYLOCK'S HOUSEHOLD

Shylock, a Jewish money lender.....	Bob Jones III
Jessica, his daughter.....	Elisabeth Emhof
Launcelot, a clownish servant to Shylock (later to Bassanio).....	Colton Beach
Tubal, a friend of Shylock.....	Philip Eoute

PORTIA'S HOUSEHOLD & SUITORS

Portia, a wealthy heiress.....	Christina Rose Yasi
Nerissa, her personal secretary.....	Rebekah Frampton
Balthazar, Portia's servant.....	Brad Payne
Prince of Morocco, suitor to Portia.....	Brad Payne
Prince of Arragon, suitor to Portia.....	Philip Eoute

THE SETTING

Italy, 1953

The play takes place in the streets of the Venice and at Belmont, Portia's country estate.

THE STORY

Virtuous Portia is heiress of the Italian estate of Belmont. Among her many suitors is the gallant but destitute Bassanio, a Venetian gentleman. Certain he cannot win Portia's hand without ample funds, he begs to borrow 3,000 ducats from his wealthy friend Antonio—the merchant of the title.

Since his own money is tied up in shipping and not wanting to disappoint his friend, Antonio resolves to take out a loan. He approaches the Jewish moneylender Shylock, a man he despises for his bad temperament and greed.

To Antonio's surprise, Shylock agrees to the loan. But in "merry sport" Shylock proposes a single condition: Antonio must sign a bond allowing Shylock to slice off a pound of Antonio's flesh should the money not be repaid in three months. Confident that his ships will return well ahead of the time, Antonio signs the bond.

But Portia is not to be wooed with ducats. Her father decreed before his death that all would-be suitors must use their wits to choose among a gold, silver or lead casket (chest). The suitor successful in unlocking the one containing Portia's portrait wins her, a task that Bassanio's wit, wisdom and sound character allow him to accomplish. The two young lovers marry, and all seems well.

Three months pass, during which time not one of Antonio's ships arrives safely home. Shylock wastes no time appealing to the Venetian courts for his pound of flesh.

Unwilling to see her new husband's friend harmed, Portia devises a plan to outwit Shylock and save Antonio. But Shylock is implacable. After a poetic discourse on mercy, the court agrees to satisfy the bond, but stipulates a condition that gives the moneylender pause.

THE PRODUCTION STAFF

Producer	Darren Lawson
Choreographer.....	Sharon Murry
Assistant Director	Margaret Stegall
Assistant Director	Alyson Burrell
Assistant Lighting Designer	Ben Hamann
Production Manager	Rodney McCarty
Assistant Production Manager.....	Dale Burden
Assistant to the Production Managers.....	Sandy Jaworski
Stage Manager	Joseph Jones
Costume/Makeup/Hair Manager.....	Dan Sandy
Costume Construction.....	Ruth Bartholomew, Julianne Ensley, Becky Sandy, Julie Tillman
Wig Master	Alicia Carr
Scenic Artist.....	Jason Waggoner
Props Master	Kathleen Martin
Technical Engineer.....	Micha Moyer
Sound Effects	Bob Johansen
Antonio Understudy.....	Jack Sterner
Shylock Understudy	Layton Talbert

A PARABLE OF MERCY

The Merchant of Venice is one of William Shakespeare's most richly complex and heatedly debated plays. In it, Shakespeare presents numerous ethical extremes—prejudice and mercy, avarice and self-sacrifice, revenge and forgiveness—within the context of a traditional Elizabethan comedy. There is love, laughter, disguise and a happy-ever-after. The problem comes in the play's insensitive and oft-offensive portrayal of the Jewish moneylender, Shylock. It is a play that forces modern audiences to examine their own biases and misconceptions, and often leaves them teetering uncomfortably between indignation at Shylock's malice and horror at the other characters' treatment of him.

In this late 16th-century play, the terms *Christian* and *Jew* appear to serve more as racial and cultural labels than as religious ones. Most of the play's Christian characters are poor examples of Christianity, just as Shylock is a poor example of Judaism.

Shylock's fraudulence is apparent: He is greedy, unforgiving, vengeful and unkind even to those who love him. But note the hypocrisy of Shakespeare's Christians: They spit on, scorn and defame their Jewish neighbors. So when the Christians cry "Foul!" at Shylock's claim to Antonio's flesh, Shylock protests that he is merely imitating them: "If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge."

Act 4's courtroom scene marks the play's climax, not only emotionally and theatrically, but also theologically. There, emerging from the muck of prejudice and pretense, the Christian ideal is given voice in Portia's famous "mercy" speech and is finally demonstrated in the mercy of the Duke and Antonio. After scene upon scene wherein those called Christians do not act like Christians, Portia's portrait of what the Jewish Apostle James might call "pure and undefiled religion" shines like a candle in the dark Venetian world.

Portia's impassioned appeal, however, cannot touch Shylock's heart. Rather, he is smug and self-righteous, demanding only the letter of the law. He resists every plea but the exact conditions of his bond. This is ultimately his downfall.

The impasse between mercy and justice transforms the courtroom scene into something larger than the case itself. The tension is not merely over Shylock's legal claim ("I'll have my bond") against Antonio's defaulted debt. Nor is the tension over the irrational cruelty of personal revenge.

Seen through the lens of a biblical worldview, the courtroom becomes a parable of the clash between Law (justice) and Gospel (mercy). The one who demands pure justice will find justice to be his undoing. Yet mercy without justice holds no one accountable for evil. God alone is able to dispense complete mercy alongside perfect justice through Christ's sacrifice. His mercy is humankind's only hope—a shorthand for the Gospel.

*Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.*

In keeping with this progression from religious caricature to religious ideal, this production dispenses with Shylock's forced conversion to Christianity. Whatever it may have communicated in Shakespeare's day, such compulsion is incongruous, not merely with modern norms of tolerance, but with the glimpse of true Christianity the audience finally sees in the courtroom.

To be sure, not everyone in the courtroom is changed. However, by scene's end it seems that both Shylock and Antonio are, if not truly changed, at least humbled. The audience leaves the courtroom hopeful that neither will treat the other as he has in the past.

Layton Talbert

RODEHEAVER AUDITORIUM | MARCH 16–18, 2017 | 8 P.M.

Music will play and lobby lights will flash three minutes before the end of intermission.
After the houselights are dimmed, latecomers will be readmitted at the discretion of the ushers.

In consideration of the actors and the enjoyment of fellow patrons, audience members are requested to turn off cell phones and other digital devices during performances.

Because of copyright restrictions, the taking of photographs and the use of recording devices are not allowed during this production.