

A Millennium Measure of Measure for Measure

An adaptation of William Shakespeare's play
Siege Perilous Project
Hill Street

Fringe shows are rarely more than an hour and a half in length, so Shakespeare does need to be adapted to fit, and so the adapted title is, in fact, more honest than letting the original stand.

This version of *Measure for measure* is set in the world of big business: the Duke becomes the MD, Angelo is his assistant, and the setting itself is hi-tech. Throughout the play the cast use mobile phones, hand-held and lap-top computers. When the Duke, as the Friar (here a management consultant!), presents Isabella with the alternatives to his plan to replace her with Marianna in Angelo's seduction, he uses a Powerpoint presentation projected onto the back wall of the set.

The programme notes tell us that

Every week, there are reports of failing businesses, sexual harassment in the workplace, ageism, dictatorial leadership and abuse of power.

These are the themes of *Measure for Measure*, and so, we are told, the play lends itself to this kind of updating.

But, of course, the acid test is whether or not the updating works. The answer here is "very nearly". Even though we may follow the programme notes' suggestion that we regard such things as the death penalty passed on Claudio as a metaphor, there are still moments where it didn't quite ring true to me. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps in modern businesses consultants are regarded in much the same way as Elizabethans regarded priests, friars and monks, but I have to say that it was this disguise of the Duke which grated on me a little. However, to judge from the reactions of others in the audience, perhaps I am wrong.

It helped, of course, that the designer and lighting designer had made excellent use of the comparatively limited facilities of the Hill Street Theatre very effectively to create exactly the right ambience, the right "feel" for a modern office.

Generally, too, the performances were good and if, occasionally, the verse was sacrificed for characterisation, this is not necessarily a bad thing, but I still cannot accept Lucio's explanation to Isabella about her brother's impending death as a rap. It got a laugh, yes, but then so would hitting someone in the face with a wet fish. A definite lapse here, I feel, in an otherwise convincing production.

Peter Lathan: 'British Theatre Guide' – 15 August, 2000