

Shakespeare for the 21st century

The Farnham Common-based professional theatre company, Siege Perilous Project, came up with a winner when they staged their first production.

For not only has 'Measure for Measure – Restructured' been given a contemporary setting, but since receiving critical acclaim at last year's Edinburgh Fringe, it has become the set text on this year's AS-level for English literature as well as the Open University's 'Shakespeare; text and performance' course.

And having seen it last week at Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Maidenhead, I can testify that it is tailor made for a young audience.

Set in an office environment with sharp-suited characters brandishing palm-held computers and mobile phones rather than swords, it is slick and stylised, a simple, clean modern production which, through expressive and easily recognizable characters, is easy to follow. If anything was difficult to understand for older members of the audience it was the hi-tech accessories and images!

The only thing which doesn't ring true in this modern setting is the storyline – where a sister, set for a nunnery, compromises herself to save the life of her brother who is condemned to death for making his girlfriend pregnant!

But this doesn't seem important as you become enthralled with Milenka James' powerful performance as the sister and Julia Rounthwaite's refreshing streetwise messenger Lucio – as well as the pregnant Juliet. Also leaving a lasting impression was Martin Carroll's portrayal of the Duke who goes undercover as a American Evangelist.

While the lighting and funky dance sequences all add to the entertainment value.

If Shakespeare continues to be presented in this manner he certainly has a future in the 21st century!

Clare Brotherwood: 'Slough Observer'