

## Meet the ‘Merchant’ and ‘Merry Wives’ this Summer

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By **Barbara Arnstein**



Live theater is the best form of entertainment for experiencing emotion vicariously, Shakespeare is theater’s best playwright, summer is the best season in which to enjoy his plays and the Hip to Hip Theatre Company, which presents them every summer, is simply the best!

This summer one of the two plays presented by the company, which travels from park to park in Queens and elsewhere, is “The Merchant of Venice.” The play was presented in the beautiful garden of Flushing’s Voelker Orth Museum on July 24. The intensely emotional story of love, friendship, prejudice and danger, was directed by David Mold. In it, a grotesque joke becomes deadly serious, prejudice poisons society, revenge overwhelms

reason and love ultimately powers crisis-resolving ingenuity.

The central character, Shylock, driven to seek revenge for his shameful mistreatment by society and even his own customers and daughter, is played with dignity and touching humanity by Doug Hendel, Emeritus Professor of Theatre at the University of Mount Union (Ohio).

Portia, one of Shakespeare’s strongest female characters, who impersonates a judge, is expertly portrayed by Hip to Hip founding member Joy Marr, while the title character (Antonio) is equally well played by her husband, fellow founding member Jason Marr. Bassanio, Portia’s husband and Antonio’s best friend, is portrayed with seeringly heartfelt emotion by William Oliver Watkins, particularly in the scene in which he must pass a unique test devised by Portia’s late father to win her hand, and in the climactic courtroom scene. Erica Nichole Walker shines as both of Portia’s unsuccessful suitors, the Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Aragon.

Shakespeare’s “The Merry Wives of Windsor” is very much like one of today’s popular prank shows! In “Merry”, also presented at various parks this summer by the Hip to Hip Theatre Company, pranks are played on one of Shakespeare’s most famous characters, Sir John Falstaff, hilariously portrayed by Doug Hendel, an Emeritus Professor of Theater. The wives, Mistress Page (the very talented Joy Marr) and Mistress Ford (the wonderful Lawryn LaCroix), whom he tries to seduce, cleverly turn the tables on him, eventually enlisting their husbands’ help in creating the biggest prank of all.

Before each show, a free half-hour interactive workshop for children, “Kids & The Classics” is presented.

- See more at: <http://queenstribune.com/meet-the-merchant-and-merry-wives-this-summer/#sthash.GmGbY1UH.dpuf>