

Press Release

A Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds Production

The Merchant of Venice

by William Shakespeare

directed by Abigail Anderson

designed by Dora Schweitzer

original music composed by Tim Jackson

musical director TJ Holmes

Dates: 17 – 27 February

Press night: Friday 19 February

"All that glisters is not gold ..." II, vii, Merchant of Venice

The Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds presents Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in a new production for its 1819 stage.

The money lender Shylock and his horrifying due: a pound of flesh. A dish of cold-served vengeance for his debtor's foolish greed – this cautionary tale resonates as clearly now as when it was first penned. One of the most notorious theatre roles in history, the complex and embittered Shylock is soon to be performed at a whisper-space from the audience at the Theatre Royal.

From the breathtaking conflict in the courtroom to the comedy surrounding Portia's suitors, subterfuge and intrigue in the backstreets of Venice to a daredevil elopement in disguise, *The Merchant of Venice* is one of Shakespeare's most exciting plays. Simply produced but beautifully told, this Theatre Royal production allows laughter, darkness, love and hate to play themselves out in equal measure.

This many faceted play has some of the most memorable speeches in all of Shakespeare's works including "Hath not a Jew eyes?" (III i), "In such a night as this ..." (V,i) and "The quality of mercy is not strained" (IV, i).

Theatre Royal Associate Director Abigail Anderson comments: "*The Merchant of Venice* is a particularly exciting play to direct because it takes the audience on a rollercoaster ride of emotion: there's tension, romantic comedy, moments of genuine friendship and tenderness, and there are some very dark scenes which make you question your own prejudices and motivations. The Theatre Royal is a wonderful space to perform Shakespeare; there is a real connection with the audience because the stage is so close. You can feel the range of emotions in the piece subtly and engage with the action in a very personal way. What judgement would you make? Who do you sympathise with?

As with our production of *Twelfth Night* last year, we will be producing the play with the Theatre's 1819 space and decor in mind. We will be accenting the piece with beautiful music played and sung live on stage to complement the beauty of the language."

The Theatre Royal welcomes back several familiar faces: Jonathan Keeble playing Shylock (*The Misanthrope, Sherlock Holmes and the Athenaeum Ghoul, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*), Joannah Tincey as Portia (*Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are, He's Much To Blame*), Oliver Senton as Antonio (*Twelfth Night*), and Amy Humphreys as Jessica (*Twelfth Night, Relatively Speaking, He's Much to Blame*).

The Merchant of Venice will also be accompanied by a rehearsed reading in collaboration with Shakespeare's Globe of the 1701 adaptation *The Jew of Venice* by George Granville. The reading of *The Jew of Venice* forms part of a season of Georgian versions of Shakespeare's plays, including Nahum Tate's happy-ending version of *King Lear* and a spoof version of *Hamlet* by John Poole.

For tickets and further details please call the Box Office on 01284 769505 or visit www.theatreroyal.org .

- Ends -

**For more information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:
Lucy Close, Communications Officer, 01284 829947, lucy@theatreroyal.org**

Notes to editors:

1. Ticket prices: £8.50 - £24.50

2. Sponsors: The Merchant of Venice is proudly sponsored by Abbeygate Wealth Management.

3. Cast and crew:

Portia - Jo Tincey
Antonio - Oliver Senton
Shylock - Jonathan Keeble
Bassanio - Dominic Marsh
Gratiano - Liam Tobin
Launcelot Gobbo - TJ Holmes
Lorenzo - Antony Eden
Solanio - Steve Giles
Nerissa - Devon Black
Jessica - Amy Humphreys
Abigail Anderson - Director
Andy Stubbs - Production Manager
Lynsey Fraser - Stage manager on Book
Mark Howland - Lighting designer
Dora Schweitzer - Designer
Sharron Stowe - Producer

Tim Jackson – Composer
Nicola Fitchett - Costume supervisor

4. The Theatre Royal Bury St. Edmunds is the last remaining working Regency Theatre in Britain and the only Theatre on the National Trust's portfolio of properties. This beautiful and intimate playhouse re-opened in 2007 following £5.3 million restoration project to restore its unique 18th century decorative scheme and layout. Today it has the special ambition to restore the lost dramatic repertoire of the Georgian era, researching and performing Georgian works in a project entitled *Restoring the Repertoire*.