

PORTLAND SHAKESPEARE PROJECT PRESENTS

# The Merchant of Venice

by William Shakespeare

in a Modern Verse Translation  
by Elise Thoron

July 10 - 20, 2025

@ Portland Playhouse



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PORTLAND SHAKESPEARE PROJECT

MICHAEL MENDELSON ARTISTIC DIRECTOR KAREN RATHJE MANAGING DIRECTOR

# The Merchant of Venice

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

IN A MODERN VERSE TRANSLATION

BY ELISE THORON

DIRECTED BY AVITAL SHIRA\*\*

## Artistic and Production

Set & Props Designer Alex Meyer

Lighting Designer Thyra Hartshorn

Sound Designer Kyle Colgan

Costume Designer Anya Jones

Stage Manager Hayley Lamsma

Production Managers Thyra Hartshorn and Haille Lantz-Sweeney

Production Assistant Amelia Grissom

## Cast

Shylock Gavin Hoffman\*

Portia Annie Leonard

Antonia Emily Sahler

Lorenzo Dylan Hankins

Bassanio Brave

Gartiano, Arragon Matt Sunderland

Jessica Olivia Mathews

Morrocco, Duke of Venice Henry Noble \*

Tubal, Gobbe Jon Lee

Nerissa Elizabeth Jackson

Launcelot, Salerio Zebadiah Bodine

Solanio, Leonardo, Stefano Maryellen Wood

Balthazar, Salarino Alannah Walker

RUN TIME: APPROXIMATELY 2 HOURS and 15-MINUTES, INCLUDING A 15-MINUTE INTERMISSION

\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

\*\*Associate Member, Stage Directors, and Choreographers Society.

# PORTLAND SHAKESPEARE PROJECT

## Sponsors



Portland Shakespeare Project gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Hitz Foundation and Play On Shakespeare for helping bring this extraordinary Shakespeare production to Portland audiences.



We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the following for their generous support of our 2025 Season and our production of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Ronni Lacroute

Stephanie & Andy Baldwin

Douglas Mouw & Steven Watson

Sharon & Paul Fishman

Marvin and Abby Dawson



Special thanks to the Ed Cauduro Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation for its continued support of our work.

# *Artistic Director's* NOTES

## *Michael Mendelson*

*The Merchant of Venice* is a play that's not new to me. Two decades ago, I had the good fortune to play Shylock with Northwest Classical Theatre Company. It was interesting playing him as a young man and experiencing the frustration of trying to make my way in a world that was set up to help me fail. Now, coming back to this play at this point in my life, I find myself seeing it in new and surprising ways.

Our current volatile social and political climate brings new urgency to questions this play raises. I always think I know what a play is "about," and then I start rehearsals and realize it's about so much more. What unfolds is richer, more layered...and, honestly, funnier than I remembered. This journey is as dark and deep as it is heartfelt and humorous. That's the contradiction at the heart of *Merchant*: we can't fully feel the tragedy if we don't also recognize ourselves in the comedy.

Back when Shakespeare wrote *Merchant* in the late 1500s, it was considered a comedy. And sure, there's love and disguise and some clever courtroom theatrics, but the scenes people remember most are the ones that dig into pain, prejudice, and power. Let's not forget there were no openly Jewish people in England when Shakespeare wrote this since they all had been expelled in 1290 under Edward I and not permitted to return until 1656. So why set this play in Venice? Possibly because, at the time, Venice had one of the first Jewish ghettos, where Jews were required to wear yellow or red hats to make them easily identified. That detail alone tells you what kind of world this play takes place in.

In this world, everyone is flawed. The Christians in the play might mean well, but they behave badly. The non-Christians don't make healthy choices either. Everybody who lives in this world is doing the best they can with what they know, given the constraints that bind them. These constraints are the systems that were put in place by others long ago that they are forced to live under. Not unlike today.

Our production of *Merchant* doesn't shy away from the ugliness—anti-Semitism, bigotry, classism, xenophobia. It holds them up to the light, but it also reveals something else: love in the most unlikely places, friendship in the most unlikely places, moments of real compassion, and a hunger for justice. And yes, it talks about mercy, too, though not always from the people you'd expect. Watching this play today can feel a bit like listening to someone quote scripture to prove a point they don't actually live by. It's uncomfortable...and timely.

This production may make you laugh, and then make you pause to wonder why. It might make you feel something sharp and surprising. And hopefully, it will leave you thinking.

*Welcome to Venice.*

And to Belmont, too.

# *Director's* NOTES

## *Avital Shira*

One cannot be Jewish and a lifetime lover of Shakespeare without having strong feelings about *The Merchant of Venice*. When it was written, *The Merchant of Venice* was extremely progressive, humanizing people at the margins and exposing the hypocrisies and trappings of prejudice. This play is one of the earliest ever written, perhaps the very first, to examine systemic hatred. We see terrible ugliness in this play – racism, sexism, and antisemitism. And while there are plenty of plays featuring prejudice and discrimination that predate and postdate this play, *Merchant of Venice* specifically concerns itself with what motivates this hatred and how both individuals and society are harmed by it.

Like many progressive plays, it has aged with more complications than plays that don't try to grapple with these hard questions. In *Merchant*, we spend so much time with the oppressors and far too little dimensionally human time with the oppressed (a problem remedied in Sarah Mantell's breathtaking reframing of this story, *Everything That Never Happened*).

And yet, in some ways *Merchant of Venice* is regrettably a play precisely for our time. How many times has our country, in the last year, has declared a separate standard for the treatment of foreigners, just as they do in this play? How many times have we attempted to appear fairhanded and rigged a system to fulfill our hearts' desires? How many times have we entreated mercy in others and proven in the next moment to be merciless ourselves? This play constantly references the world – a container that is "rude" and "weary." How many times have we referenced something similar when answering a question about how we are doing? We live in a world, like the world of this play, in which we are all still caught by the systems that oppress us. No one is above them.

*Merchant of Venice* is filled with deeply flawed humans trapped in systems of oppression – both as oppressors and they try to escape. It is everyone's undoing. And so this play

sometimes, despite our best efforts to grapple with it and make it otherwise, also reinforces systemic oppression. It both critiques racism, and by not centering Morocco fully in the play, is racist. It both asks "Hath not a Jew eyes, hands, dimensions, organs, senses, affections, passions?" and also does not give us time to fully experience those dimensions, senses, affections, and passions in its Jewish characters. It is an imperfect play, as we are imperfect in the task of meeting it. And yet these questions of the nature of humanity, of human-made systems reinforced even by the humans attempting to defy them, are ever-present, not only in the play, but in the performing of the play, and in the way that this play meets our society today.

President Donald Trump recently used Shylock as a pejorative, exemplifying an unscrupulous banker. In doing so, he entirely missed the point. Shylock does not enter the story amoral – he begins with a desire to no longer be othered and instead to connect to his oppressors. He is a deeply human character who is also deeply flawed. And human fallibility is not what we need to root out of society. We need to change the systems of differential treatment and discrimination, so that society can be more fair and more kind. And we need to contend with complexity much more than President Trump is willing to.

May we all grapple with the ugliness of our humanity, and its capacity in one and the same moment to find joy, connection, humor, mercy, and all the messiness of "muddy clay" in a "rude world." May we strive to find better ways to dismantle the systems of oppression not only for ourselves but for all humanity, without reinforcing them. May we together, here at the theatre, confront the potential for ugliness and the capacity for love that lies in each of us. And may we, in so confronting, challenge ourselves to find ways to heal, and to harm less.



Gavin Hoffman

Gavin Hoffman (Shylock) is happy to join the cast of *Merchant of Venice*. Some Portland credits include: *Major Barbara*, *Crossing Minisose*, *Astoria*, *Parts 1 & 2*, *Great Expectations*, *Cyrano*, *Othello*, & *Clybourne Park* (Portland Center Stage); *The Understudy*, *American Hero*, and *The Monster Builder* (Artists Repertory Theatre); *5th of July*, *Indecent*, and *Appropriate* (Profile Theatre). He has also previously worked at Portland Shakespeare Project, Portland Playhouse, Third Rail, CoHo, Shaking the Tree, Theatre Vertigo, Triangle, & Lakewood. Regionally, Gavin has worked at DCPA in Denver, Book-It in Seattle, The Shakespeare Theatre in D.C., Tulane Summer Shakespeare Festival in New Orleans, Princeton Rep in NJ, and PCPA in Santa Maria, CA. He spent a long time working in various theatre companies in New York City as well. Gavin has guest-starred in *Portlandia* (IFC), *The Big Easy* (USA), and *Leverage* (TNT), and co-starred in *Grimm* (NBC). He is the recipient of four Drammy Awards for acting. Gavin is a graduate of P.C.P.A. and has a B.F.A. in acting from Ithaca College. He is a proud member of Actors' Equity and SAG-AFTRA.

Gavin teaches Shakespeare in person and online, teaches acting at Bridgetown Conservatory, directs plays from time to time, builds odd things, draws, and cooks a lot. He would like to thank Christy Bigelow for all her love and support, and their dogs, Charlie & Murphy, for not judging him too harshly.

*Please note: Gavin joined the cast just ten days before opening, so he may have a script in hand for this performance.*



Annie Leonard

Annie Leonard (Portia) Annie could not be more thrilled to be working with this brilliant cast and Portland Shakespeare Project. A graduate of NYU Tisch, Annie also studied Shakespearean performance at RADA in London. She has been lucky enough to perform locally, internationally and across the country. Annie is also a licensed realtor and the cofounder and Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theatre Company. She is forever grateful for her incomparable friends and family and their endless support.



Emily Sahler

Emily Sahler (Antonia) is thrilled to be making her Portland Shakes debut, but she has been performing in the Portland area for (ahem) a really, really long time. Favorite roles include Connie (*Jack Goes Boating*), Sister Lidwina (*Gracie and the Atom*), and Bette (*The Marriage of Bette and Boo*) at Artists Repertory Theatre; Rose (*Gypsy*), Jack's Mother (*Into the Woods*), and Doreen (*Tartuffe*) at Lakewood Theatre Company; Genie (*Beautiful: the Carole King Musical*), Miss Adelaide (*Guys & Dolls*), Jenny (*Company*), Domina (*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*), Mrs. Meers (*Thoroughly Modern Millie*), Mrs. Tottendale (*The Drowsy Chaperone*), and Barbara (*The Bikinis*) at The Broadway Rose; Bonnie (*Anything Goes*) and Sheila (*Hair*) at Portland Civic Theatre; several shows at Oregon Children's Theatre, as well as Profile Theatre Project, CoHo Productions, triangle productions, Musical Theatre Company Portland Center Stage, Columbia Theatre Company, and the Summer Festival Theatre Co. Television credits: *Trinkets*, *Life After First Failure*, *The Librarians*, *Grimm*, *Portlandia*, and *Leverage*. Proud member of SAG-AFTRA.



Brave

Brave (Bassanio) has had one hulluva journey - not all that glitters is gold. It's been a year of filth and hibernation, but we're back and worse than ever. The last time we played was in Third Rail's *Sanctuary City* and ETP's *Importance of Being Earnest*. And while we could have learned to surf with the rising tide, we had to roll with the punches, the coping, the poverty, and to live off the generosity of our community. Interrupting your scheduled program; Did you know artists have a life full of secrets and underpinnings of loss? If you care to know just poke or prod, stick out your tongue, and remember how to be human. Gratitude as a practice reminds us we are who we are because of collective collaborations like: The Actors Conservatory, Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble, Stella Adler Conservatory, Double Edge Theatre Ensemble, The Radical Faeries, and the indigenous lineages that preserve the balance of our place in this world. We love you. Now hit the streets, suckers - there's a stage out there and no one can play the part you were made for.



Dylan Hankins



Matt Sunderland

Dylan Hankins is honored to make his Portland Shakes debut. He studied World Languages at Lewis & Clark College ('21). He has translated two works from the Spanish: Miguel Romero *Esteo's Tartessos: a Memorial (to/from) the Darkness* and *Lorca's The House of Bernarda Alba*. He was the writer-director-actor for *(de) composition, Sprawl* (CoHo theatre), and *FAENA* (PETE Presents). Other notable works include: *CHEKHOV! 3 Farces* (21ten), *Spear* (Corrib Theatre), and *Reflections of a Garbage Collector* (Lewis & Clark), and *Banned* (Hand2Mouth). His goal has always been to transcend the binaries between "high art" and "low art," morality and libertinism, the holy and the impure, the personal and the foreign, the profound and the profoundly stupid, and by doing so, making such distinctions feel unimportant.

Matt Sunderland Matt is a local theatre artist who has been working on and around Portland's stages for over a decade. Recent credits include *Boise, Idaho* (Gather Repertory Theatre, director), *R.U.R.*, *The Leading Ladies*, *Murder on the Orient Express* (Lakewood Theatre), *And Then There Were None* (Clackamas Repertory Theatre), *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth* (Speculative Drama), *Farragut North* (Gresham Reader's Theatre, director), and others. Matt is also a proud company member with Imago Theatre, where he has performed in *Salome*, *Port Authority*, *Shining City*, *Happy Times* and *Special K*. Matt is represented by Q6 Model & Artist Management, and recently was featured in the Lionsgate distributed film, *Cellar Door*. He will next be seen in the fall at Lakewood Theatre as Renfield in *Dracula*. Many thanks to Michael, Avital and the PSP team for making the bucket list Shakespeare dream come true.



Olivia Mathews



Henry Noble

Olivia Mathews Olivia Mathews is a performer, director, deviser, teacher based in Portland, OR. Olivia's work is process focused, rigorous, expressive and devoted to collaboration as a means of practicing community and self-advocacy. Most recent performance credits include *Hindsight 2020* (Risk/Reward), *ENDURANCE the boat, the show* (CoHo Theatre), *From A Hole in the Ground* (Corrib Theatre), *Blood Wedding* and *Forbidden Fruit* (Shaking the Tree Theatre). Directing credits include *Precipice* (Third Rail), *A Case for the Existence of God* (asst, Third Rail) and *The Americans* (PETE). Olivia also holds a certification from Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble's Institute for Contemporary Performance.

Henry Noble holds a B.A. in Theatre from the University of La Verne and received specialized training at the Denver Center Theatre Academy. He is making his debut with Portland Shakespeare Company.

His regional stage credits include August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*, *Ayano* and *Besides Herself* (Ensemble Studio Theatre), *The Threepenny Opera* (A Noise Within Theatre), *Detroit '67* (Actors Studio Theatre), *Fraternity* (Ebony Repertory Theatre), *Dutchman* (Shoe Box Theatre), *Streamers* (The Actors Studio), *Inspecting Carol* (Artists Repertory Theatre), *Havana Bourgeois* (The Ford Theatre), *A Fig For Such A Life* (Tears of Joy Theatre), and appearances at the Ojai Shakespeare Festival. His classical work includes *Romeo & Juliet* (The Actors Ensemble), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Tygres Heart Shakespeare Company), *Richard II*, and *The Trial* (La Bodega Theatre).

Noble's screen work continues to grow across major television and streaming platforms. He currently recurs on the hit series *Sistas* on BET and recently filmed an episode of *9-1-1* opposite Angela Bassett. Other credits include *Yellowstone*, *Better Call Saul*, *Z Nation*, *Grimm*, and the upcoming second season of *Fallout* on Amazon Prime, where he appears opposite Walton Goggins.

His film credits include *Beyond Treachery: Crabs in a Barrel*, *The Neighbors Are Watching*, *The Never List*, *The Competition*, *Identity*, and *Entering the Unknown*—showcasing his range and ability to bring authenticity to every character.

Outside of acting, Noble channels his creativity through music as “DJ Noble.” A sought-after performer, he brings high energy and curated soundscapes to exclusive events, charitable functions, and private parties.

Driven by a deep belief in the power of art, Noble views performance as both a calling and a tool for social impact. He is a vocal advocate for the recognition and fair treatment of artists and educators, championing their essential role in shaping culture and community. To learn more or connect with Henry Noble, visit [www.dj-noble.com](http://www.dj-noble.com) or follow him on Instagram @



Jon Lee

Jon Lee Jon has been acting on stage and in films in Seattle, Portland, and Tucson. It's his first play with this really wonderful group of coconspirators, the cast and crew of *The Merchant of Venice*. A native of Portland, he enjoys hiking and camping and filmmaking when he's not acting. And thrilled to be a part of the reviving arts scene in PDX.

Elizabeth Jackson is delighted to make her PSP debut as Nerissa. Liz holds a BA in Theatre from Texas Wesleyan University. Recent onstage work includes various Fertile Ground projects, Out of Hand Puppet Slam, readings at PassinArt and Gresham Reader's Theatre, *God's Favorite* (as Rose) at PassinArt and *Red Velvet* (as Ellen Tree) at BagnBaggage. Favorite roles include: The West Coast Premier of *Girl in The Red Corner* (as Halo), and *Blasted* (as Cate). This fall she'll be directing *The Tempest* at ACMA, marking her third year with Portland Playhouse's Fall Festival of Shakespeare, supported by Shakespeare and Co. You can see her in the winter at Lakewood Theatre in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Her film project *The Altruist* can be seen on the Bloody Disgusting channel. Liz thanks her incredibly supportive and loving family. Special thanks forever to Matt.



Elizabeth Jackson



Zebadiah Bodine

Zebadiah Bodine is thrilled to make his Portland Shakespeare Project debut! You may have seen him recently as Jeff in *Kimberly Akimbo* with Twilight Theater, or in parks all around Portland with Original Practice Shakespeare Festival. You are much less likely to have seen him in a catalogue of productions with Perseverance Theatre, Theatre in the Rough, and The Orpheus Project, among others, in his hometown of Juneau, Alaska. He would like to thank his lovely girlfriend Emma for tolerating him; his lovely cats for tolerating him; and you, the lovely audience, for your continued support of the arts. And for tolerating him.



Maryellen Wood

Maryellen Wood is excited to be working again with Portland Shakespeare Project after previously playing Ophelia in *Hamlet* last year in their collaboration with The Actor's Conservatory! She is a graduate of The Actor's Conservatory in Portland and Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo with BA in Theatre Arts minoring in Dance and Anthropology. You might have seen her around town as Young Girl in *Blood Wedding* (Shaking the Tree Theatre), Lucius in *Julius Caesar* (Canon Shakespeare Company), Young Mitsy in *Who's Who* (Fertile Ground Festival/Rogue Pack), and Corin in *Mimetic Desire* (Salt & Sage). She is very grateful to be working with this fabulous cast and crew!



Alannah Walker

Alannah Walker is an actor from Iowa who recently moved to Portland. She has a BA in Musical Theatre from Clarke University, and just completed her first year at The Actors Conservatory. She has recently been seen onstage as Little Red in *Into The Woods*, Catherine in *Proof*, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Mary in *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*. She is excited to make her Portland debut and couldn't have done it without the support of her family and friends... and her cats, Kylo and Mac.

#### Avital Shira (she/her) Director

Avital is thrilled to have this opportunity to return home to Portland, OR to grapple with this play. Other directing credits include *Winter People* (Boston Playwright's Theatre), *Photograph 51*, *Everything That Never Happened*, *Cymbeline*, *Intimate Apparel*, *My Fair Lady* (Boston University), *Love's Labour's Lost* (Post5), and *Twelfth Night* (Portland Actor's Ensemble). Avital is passionate about working at the intersection of storytelling, community, and social impact. She has an M.F.A. in Directing and graduate certificate in Arts Management from Boston University and a B.A. in Theatre Studies and English from Yale University. Avital also served as the dramaturg for the Play On Shakespeare translation of *Merchant of Venice* in New York, and has recently been involved in developing new work with playwrights including Sarah Mantell, E.M. Lewis, Ash, Ali Viterbi, and Danielle Frimer. She thanks her partner Micah, her daughter Adira, and her parents Rabbis Laurie Rutenberg and Gary Schoenberg, for supporting her in making directing possible while also parenting and serving as a strategist in the Office of the Associate Vice Provost for the Arts at Georgia Tech. [www.avitalshira.com](http://www.avitalshira.com).

#### Haille Lantz-Sweeney Production Manager

Haille Lantz-Sweeney is a Portland-based production manager and occasional stage manager. Most often you can find her in the role of Associate Production Manager at Portland Center Stage. She's a proud Oregon State Alumni (Go Beavs!). She grew up in SE Portland and is overjoyed to be a part of the Portland theater community. She extends her gratitude to the Portland Shakespeare Project for bringing her along on this journey with *The Merchant of Venice*. She sends love to her family, friends, and husband Kane for listening to her type away at emails and always supporting her in all her endeavors in theatre and out.

#### Amelia Grissom Production Assistant

Amelia is studying theatre at Reed College. She has previously worked at Broadway Rose Theatre Company, PHAME, and Risk/Reward. She is super excited to be involved with her first show at Portland Shakespeare Project!

#### Hayley Lamsma (she/they) Stage Manager

Hayley has worked as a Stage Manager in Portland and the surrounding area for the last three years. They have a bachelor's degree in Theatre and Writing from George Fox University and have worked with companies including The Actors Conservatory, Shaking the Tree, Penguin Productions, Gather Repertory, and Lakewood Theatre, in both SM and ASM roles. Previous credits include *Nora*, *Maltese Falcon*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *Alabaster*, *Hamlet*, *Almost Maine*, *Blood Wedding*, *Twelfth Night*, *Forbidden Fruit*, *Oliver! The Musical*, *Our Town*,

and *Much Ado About Nothing*. She also has varying props design credits, as well as a perpetual desire to tell stories and experience art.

#### Alex Meyer Set and Props Designer

Alex is happy to be returning to Portland Shakes! Credits include with Portland Center Stage (*The Light*), Profile Theatre (*Mother Russia*, *Samsara*), Artists Repertory Theatre (*Sapience*), Third Rail Repertory Theatre (*Precipice*, *Middletown Mall*, *The Music Man*), and Shaking The Tree Theatre (*We Wrote This With You In Mind*), as well as designs with Orpheus PDX, Oregon Children's Theatre, The Theatre Company, Portland Shakespeare Project, PassinArt, Broadway Rose Theatre Co., Bag&Baggage Productions, Crave Theatre, Imago Theatre, The Actors Conservatory, Hand2Mouth, and others. She has production designed for clients such as Visit Seattle, Intel, and the Portland Timbers. More at [www.designbyalexmeyer.com](http://www.designbyalexmeyer.com).

#### Thyra Hartshorn Lighting Designer and Production Manager

Thyra Hartshorn is a multi-faceted behind-the-scenes theatre person. She is currently the Director of Production for Portland Playhouse and PSM for local companies including NW Dance Project, Rejoice African Dance Theatre and Columbia Dance. Her training includes an MFA in production and design with a concentration in stage management from the University of California, Irvine. Thyra has toured and worked with companies around the world including The Shakespeare Theatre in DC, San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and the Bolshoi Ballet. Locally she's also worked with Oregon Ballet Theatre, Profile Theatre, White Bird and Sebé Kan. Thyra has taught high school stagecraft as well as college-level stage & production management.

#### Kyle Colgan (he/they) Sound Designer

Kyle is a local sound engineer and designer who is most often found as the Mainstage A1 at Portland Center Stage. He earned a BFA in Sound Design and Engineering from Southern Oregon University, and recently made his Portland sound design debut with *Nora* for The Actors Conservatory.

#### Anya Jones (they/them) Costume Designer

Anya is an actor and costume designer originally from Seattle, WA. A graduate of Willamette University Theatre and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art Semester Program, they have recently performed with Theatre 33 and Third Rail Repertory's Mentorship Cohort. Their costuming work was previously seen in *Nora* with The Actor's Conservatory, and they are thrilled to be designing again for *The Merchant of Venice*. Website: [anyajones.com](http://anyajones.com)

**Thank You for coming!**

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