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The Merchant Of Venice: Arkangel Shakespeare



Synopsis

In Shakespeare's most controversial play, the opposing values of justice and mercy must be resolved. Antonio promises money to help his friend Bassanio woo Portia. He borrows the sum needed from the cruel Shylock, but there will be a dreadful penalty if the loan is not repaid. The golden world of Portia's Belmont calls forth some of Shakespeare's most lyrical love poetry. But the dark shadow of Shylock is never far from the heart of this brilliant comedy as it moves toward its courtroom climax. Portia is played by Hadyn Gwynne and Shylock by Trevor Peacock. Julian Rhind-Tutt is Bassanio, and Bill Nighy is Antonio.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 2 hours and 16 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Original recording

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Language: English

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Customer Reviews

If you are teaching Shakespeare and you want a good cd to liven up the readings in your class, this will work well. In fact, the entire series by this organization seems to be very good. I own Macbeth, MoV, and Hamlet, and all of them are very good. They are excellent supplements to our class readings.

We normally assign roles and read one or two Shakespeare plays aloud a year. Our family enjoys this way of reading his plays. But this year, our time commitment out of the home was not allowing me the time to make this happen. Cindy Rollins of the Ordo Amoris blog highly recommended the Arkangel recordings so I ordered. Am I glad I did! We have listened to other recordings and were not pleased with them. Usually, we could not understand everything being said because of poor elocution or speaking too fast. We have not had that problem at all and have loved the dramatic

style of the reading actors. Launcelot, the comic relief, is our favorite. Well done! I grieved at the idea that we were dropping Mr. Shakespeare this year. Not so, and what a find in the midst of struggle.

It's hard to listen to Shakespeare on audio book. Good actors can physically elucidate the source material for an audience with gestures, movements and facial expressions above and beyond what they do with the delivery of their lines alone. Still, this was a very good audio version of "The Merchant of Venice", with Trevor Peacock as Shylock standing out as memorable. The actress who played Portia was talented as well, and has a naturally husky voice that lent itself to this role where she would have to disguise herself as a male.

I had my 8th graders listen to this as we followed along in class. They found it VERY helpful to hear the emotions, pauses, and nuances of language. (side note: Lancelot Gobbo was fairly entertaining)

This is one of my favorite Shakespeare plays and, overall, the ensemble reads the play very well; I especially liked Trevor Peacock as Shylock. I did find Launcelot's narration a bit over the top, but hearing the play is the next best thing to seeing it performed. The Merchant Of Venice is not performed as much as it used to be because of its supposedly anti-Semitic plot. However, Shakespeare gives Shylock one of the most dramatic and telling speeches in the play "...If You prick us, do we not bleed?...etc. As with many of his plays, Shakespeare's words and actions have deeper meanings. A play to hear (and see) many times.

I listened to this for the diction more than anything. I was expressly interested in the Shylock scenes as part of my research into the character. Most of the scenes are good with decent energy level, but in others I was disappointed. If you want the experience of the performance this doesn't have that for you. If you're more interested in how Shakespeare's English is sounded out, this is an excellent tool.

Trevor Peacock's fine reading of Shylock saves this from complete mediocrity; the rest of the cast wavers between adequate and appalling. Bill Nighy's rendition of Antonio is in the latter category: how such an acclaimed actor can get away with this woeful performance makes me fear for the future of Shakespearean acting. He speaks his lines as if his mouth is full of treacle, constantly emphasizes the wrong words, and clearly doesn't understand what he is saying. Julian Rhind-Tutt

as Bassanio is only marginally better; Haydn Gwynne as Portia is barely adequate; and Colin Salmon's desecration of the Moroccan Prince is laughable (as is Will Keen's desparate rendering of Gratiano). Sarah-Jane Holm's Jessica is the best of the supporting parts but it is Peacock's portrayal of Shylock that elevates this to the three-star rating. He's relatively understated, never over-acting or hamming it up, and he reads the lines with an assurance that the rest of the cast could have learned from. Oh yes, and Dominique Le Gendre's music is as magical as ever.

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