Acting solid, plot confuses in ‘Measure’

By Theresa Puchner
Entertainment Editor

Fornication was a sin of the soul as well as a sin of society in Elizabethan England, and justice for this offense was severely determined. This is the dilemma that faces the Duke in the current production of Shakespeare’s ‘Measure for Measure’.

The play involves the sentencing of Claudio (Dave Corwin) to the gallows for having illicit relations with a maid. The Duke, besetting the legal responsibilities of his aide, Angelo (Michael McCandless), disposes of himself as a friar and retreats to the court.

Angelo assumes his new command with haughtiness and sentences Claudio to be beheaded. Claudio pleads with Lucio (Vito LaBella) to talk with Claudio’s sister, Isabella (Tasmazine Medinger) to have her case heard by the Duke.

The plot soon reveals that the high and mighty Angelo is guilty of the same offense for which he sentences Claudio. Angelo develops an attraction to Isabella and tells her he will free Claudio if she surrenders her virginity to Angelo.

Acting good

The double-duty Duke (now a friar) devises a scheme that saves both Isabella’s virginity and Claudio’s life. The play closes with the unmasking of the Duke and his marriage to Isabella.

Angelo’s hidden misdeeds are made public and in his embarrassment, he is sentenced to marry his former fiancée.

All of the actors delivered the difficult Shakespearean script with clarity and facility. McCandless exhibited an excellent restraint of emotion necessary to portray the over-ambitious authority of Angelo. A fragile and heartbroken Isabella was well-performed by Medinger.

Bill Hutson, who also directed the play, displayed his usual professionalism in the roles of the Duke and the phony friar. LaBella should be commended for the liveliness and naturalness he displayed as Lucio.

Confusing plot

Although the play was well presented, the story line, in typical Shakespearean fashion, was confusing. A play based on the interchange of many hidden relationships between a large group of people (some in dual roles) is difficult to follow. There is also a tendency to lose interest in the plot because of the unchanging theme.

The real drama of the play is not so much provided by the actors, as is usually the case, but by the combination of visual and audio effects. The intervals of moody music and darkness between acts appeals to the audience.

Black-capped friars carrying candles that pierce the dark theater, clashes of music at the climax of the action, the rotation of colored lights to create atmosphere and excellent actors robed in attractive costumes—are the qualities by which this performance should be judged.

‘Measure for Measure’ (which opened Thursday) plays today and Saturday and March 3-6, 8 p.m. in the Eppley Little Theater. Call 280-2636 for reservations.