THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

By William Shakespeare
Directed by Igor Golyak

L. Arkansas Light* – Stage Manager
Nastya Bugaeva – Scenic & Costume Designer
Jeff Adelberg** – Lighting Designer
Dewey Della – Sound Designer
Steve Vieira – Props Designer
Ksenya Litvak – Puppet Designer

CAST
in alphabetical order

Anna Bortnick – Jessica / Ensemble
Darya Denisova – Nerissa / Ensemble
Jesse Hinson* – Bassanio/ Ensemble
Nael Nacer* – Shylock / Ensemble
Jordan Palmer – Launcelot Gobbo / Ensemble
Dennis Trainor* – Antonio / Ensemble
Peter Walsh – Lorenzo / Ensemble
Gigi Watson* – Portia / Ensemble

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States
**Member of United Scenic Artists Local 829

Recording or taking photos of the performance is not permitted.
The first words of Shakespeare’s most famous play, *Hamlet*—“Who’s there?”—are a plea or demand called out into the darkness. It is a call to the other characters in the play but also a call to whomever may be present in the audience. The words denote both uncertainty and possibility. This somehow seems appropriate to where we find ourselves in 2021, amidst an ongoing pandemic and social justice revolution. We call out “Who’s there?” knowing with sadness that we have lost many colleagues and loved ones. We call out “Who’s there?” as a plea for solidarity, with the hope that our community of artists and audiences are all willing and able to stand and unfold themselves. We have missed you, and we are proud to bring you new and exciting programming in our 2021-22 season.

The idea of standing and unfolding oneself is truly manifested in the offerings we have this season. Each play unveils the idea of opening up and sharing one’s identity with the world. In *The Merchant of Venice*, it is the characters’ heinous disregard for humanity that defines them, showing how easily we can turn our backs on the human condition. *The Bomb-itty of Errors* shares its essence through comic twists and turns of mistaken identity, all in a rap format, and a remixing of Shakespeare’s original play, *The Comedy of Errors*. We end the season with *As You Like It*, through which we will explore the challenges, opportunities, and roadblocks during a gender identity journey. This year we will also continue our “Holding the Mirror Up” reading series that we began last spring. This new annual tradition will illuminate classical plays through different lenses of identity.

I am so excited to navigate this season of sharing and reflection with you all. I am holding a good thought for all of us as we move through the challenges the world has placed in our paths. As we strive to build new opportunities, I look forward to reflecting on what we might want to unfold about ourselves, in our work, in our lives, and in our hearts.

All my best,

— Christopher V. Edwards
I generally try to refrain from writing director’s notes as I feel I cannot adequately express on paper what I can through the language of theater—otherwise I would be a writer. But I will endeavor to share my inspiration for creating this strange world in which everything is reversed. A play in which the genre is subjective, and the villain could be seen as the hero, while the heroes of the past are seen as villains of the present. I ask myself, how can this be? Is there no constant truth? How can a play that was written in Elizabethan England about a villainous Jew (in a place where Jews had not lived for nearly 300 years) be presented today without taking into account this history? Should we just cut these anti-Semitic lines from the play—a play that was used as propaganda against the Jews throughout various times in history? The line “hath not a Jew eyes?” was not posed as a real question until the 19th century. Apparently, we Jews do not. We have to face the fact that The Merchant of Venice is extremely anti-Semitic, and that Shakespeare was using what many now perceive as the humanizing monologues of Shylock for comedic effect. Nevertheless, as any great creation, the play has a life of its own. Like a child growing up through the ages, this “comedy” has been interpreted by many and re-named as a “problem play.”

In staving this “problem play” today, we cannot avoid taking into account both the history of the Holocaust and the persistence of anti-Semitism in our own time. In the 1930s, The Merchant of Venice was prescribed by Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels as part of the Final Solution, proof of why the Jewish people deserved to be exterminated. Shylock is meant to be a villain, a Jewish villain, and was used as such, in a world where “good” defeats “evil.”

In July 2021, a Rabbi was stabbed outside his synagogue in Brighton—just five miles from where we are now staging our own Merchant of Venice.

It’s easy now to look back and judge who was “good” and who was “evil” in Nazi Germany, but would it have been that easy to do if we were living in it? What if we are still living in it? Was it easy for the Germans living in that time period to understand the truth? I don’t know. It’s easy to judge the past as we look back on it from a distance. Who can definitively say that 70 years from today people won’t look back and say that we in 2021 lived just like the Nazis in the 1930s? This is a question we must pose to ourselves, instead of coming to a play and patting ourselves on the back for being on the right side of history. You may say it’s an exaggeration…yes, it’s very uncomfortable to admit. It is difficult for me to admit as well.

Shylock’s fate is predetermined by the genre chosen by William Shakespeare. Was Shakespeare an anti-Semite? I don’t know, and I don’t care. What I care about is my son Jacob and daughter Esther, who will live in this comical world that will always have the potential of turning into a holocaust.

- IGOR GOLYAK
Antonio, a merchant of Venice, agrees to finance his friend Bassanio’s attempt to win a rich bride—the heiress Portia, whose estate, Belmont, lies some miles away. Bassanio has spent his inheritance and cannot afford to suitably woo her. Antonio has no cash available—his money is all invested in various trading voyages—but his credit is good, and he agrees to look for someone to lend him money for Bassanio’s use. Bassanio approaches Shylock, a Jewish moneylender who charges interest on loans, a practice which Antonio believes is against Christian teaching. Shylock offers to lend to Antonio at no interest, instead proposing “a merry bond”: if he cannot repay the loan by the due date, Shylock will take “a pound of flesh” from Antonio’s body.

Meanwhile, in Belmont, Portia and her lady, Nerissa, are inundated with “suitors.” Portia cannot choose for herself, however. Her late father has devised a test for each would-be husband: he must choose among three caskets: one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead. If he chooses the casket with Portia’s picture inside, he wins her hand. If he chooses wrong, he must leave at once with a promise never to marry.

In Venice, Shylock’s daughter Jessica makes plans to run away with Bassanio’s friend Lorenzo. While Shylock is out, Jessica steals some of his gold and jewels and leaves with Lorenzo. Distraught, Shylock tries to find out where she is but learns only that she and Lorenzo are together, spending extravagantly. He also hears that Antonio, his ships wrecked, has no money to repay the loan.

In Belmont, two suitors, “The Prince of Morocco” and “The Prince of Aragon,” venture to choose, but each picks the wrong casket. Then Bassanio arrives. Portia, who remembers meeting him before, has secretly hoped he might come. He chooses the right casket and wins her hand, while his friend Graziano has successfully wooed Nerissa. In the midst of rejoicing, however, they learn that Antonio cannot pay his debt, and Shylock intends to take his pound of flesh. Bassanio and Graziano leave for Venice with money from Portia to help Antonio. Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as men and follow.

As the hearing of Shylock’s claim against Antonio begins before the Duke, a young lawyer arrives (Portia in disguise, with Nerissa as her clerk), ostensibly sent by a learned Paduan to conduct questioning. The outcome of the trial finds Antonio saved and Shylock bereft of all he owns and ordered to become a Christian.

Who has a right to love? Who has a right to revenge? Who is deserving of mercy? Set in our present moment—against a backdrop of the duality of Venice’s Carnevale—ASP’s production asks how much we have truly evolved in our empathy for those we think of as the “other.”
JEFF ADELBERG** (Lighting Designer)  
For ASP: King Lear, Edward II, God’s Ear, The Comedy of Errors, As You Like It, Middletown, Medea, The Hotel Nepenthe, Anthony and Cleopatra, Timon of Athens, The Duchess of Malfi, The Tempest, Macbeth (2007), Titus Andronicus. Previous collaborations with director Igor Golyak: The Seagull and The Stone with his company, Arlekin Players’ Theatre. Other recent work: Vanity Fair and Frankenstein (Underground Railway Theatre); The Children, Curious Incident..., Hand to God (SpeakEasy Stage); I Am A Dreamer Who No Longer Dreams (Whitesnake Projects); La Cenerentola (Boston Midsummer Opera); Trouble in Tahiti (Boston Lyric Opera); A Doll’s House Part 2, True West, Gloria, Night of the Iguana (The Gamm Theatre); Beckett Women: Ceremonies of Departure (Poets’ Theatre at the MAC Belfast, Northern Ireland); Birdy, Macbeth, Death and the Maiden (Commonwealth Shakespeare); Man of La Mancha (New Repertory Theatre); Last Night at Bowl-Mor Lanes, Million Dollar Quartet, Onegin (Greater Boston Stage Co.); and Boston’s Christmas Revels since 2010. A graduate of the University of Connecticut, Jeff teaches at Boston College, Brandeis University, and Boston University. Member of United Scenic Artists 829. www.jeffadelberg.com

ANNA BORTNICK (Jessica) is excited to return to The Merchant of Venice! Recent credits include: Baskerville (Gloucester Stage Company), ChekhovOs (Arlekin Players Theatre), Parade (Moonbox Productions), and Pride and Prejudice (Actors Shakespeare Project). She received her B.F.A. from Boston University and has trained at the National Theater Institute, Bard Berlin Theater, and the Chicago iO Improv Theater. Many thanks to everyone on the ASP team for their work remounting this production! (www.annabortnick.com)

NASTYA BUGAEVA (Costume and Scenic Designer) graduated from Moscow Art Theatre in 2009 with a degree in Set Design. In 2018, she became a professor leading a class at the Moscow Art Theater. Nastya has collaborated on over 40 productions at the Moscow Art Theatre, Sovremennik Theatre, Mayakovsky Theatre, Masterskaya Fomenko Theatre, Vakhntangov Theatre, Theatre of Nations, Moscow Satire Theatre, and Krasnoyarsk Theatre of Opera and Ballet, among others. She has worked with world-renowned directors such as M. Brusnikina, V. Ryzhakov, A. Sigalova, V.Petrov, and V.Mirzoyev. She is a regular participant in national exhibitions of theatre designers such as the Russian Shakespeare, Northern Stage, Newcastle Upon Tyne (UK), Season Results, Baltic Seasons, and others. Nastya is a “Your Chance 2009” exhibition laureate (Grand Prize for Best Set Design for Don Juan by Moliere)

CALEY CHASE (Dramaturg) is a director and dramaturg based in Brooklyn. Previously at Actors’ Shakespeare Project, she was the dramaturg for Equivocation and Pride & Prejudice. Her recent directing credits include: Overture, The View From Mem Church, & feeling now (The Huntington’s Dream Boston Series), Love and Information (Brandeis University), and readings with Trinity Rep, Fresh Ink Theatre, Harvard Playwrights’ Festival, Speakeasy Stage, and Fort Point Theatre Channel. Assistant directing credits include: Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, Romeo and Juliet, & Sherlock’s Last Case (Huntington Theatre Co), Faithful Cheaters (Trinity Rep), Familar & Macbeth (A.R.T. Institute), Macbeth (Shakespeare & Co, also dramaturg), among others. Caley is a graduate of Brandeis University and the former Artistic Associate at The Huntington. www.caleychase.com

DEWEY DELLAY (Composer/Sound Designer) Some of the past shows Dewey has designed for are Cardboard Piano, The Bakelite Masterpiece (New Rep); The Little Foxes, The Thanksgiving Play (Lyric Stage Company); Nat Turner in Jerusalem (Actors’ Shakespeare Project);
DARYA DENISOVA (Nerissa) is delighted to be making her ASP debut with this production of The Merchant of Venice. Darya has been performing at Arlekin Players Theatre since 2014, where her credits include Memorial Prayer, Natasha’s Dream, Dead Man’s Diary, The Seagull, and State VS Natasha Banina. Darya received her MFA at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts in Moscow, and taught acting at the Startalk School at Harvard University and Stanislavsky System at the Igor Golyak Acting Studio. Her latest appearance is with (zero-g) virtual theater lab as Natasha Prozorov in chekhovOS alongside Mikhail Baryshnikov and Jessica Hecht.

IGOR GOLYAK (Director) Igor Golyak is the founder of the Arlekin Players Theatre and Zero Gravity (zero-G) Virtual Theater Lab. His most recent projects, chekhovOS /an experimental game/ and State vs. Natasha Banina, became international virtual theatre sensations, both earning New York Times Critics’ Picks. His work with Arlekin has won numerous awards in the United States and internationally, most recently multiple Elliot Norton awards for his production of The Stone and The Seagull. His theatre has been invited to perform on famous stages and at world-renowned festivals all over the world, including Moscow Art Theatre, and festivals in Yerevan, Armenia, New York City, Chicago, Lviv, Ukraine, Monaco, and many others. This fall 2021, he will be directing WITNESS at Arlekin Players Theatre. Golyak received a Master’s Degree in Directing from the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts in 2004, as well as an acting degree from Moscow’s Schukin Theatre Institute (Vakhtangov Theater). Igor has been an Associate Professor of Acting at Boston Conservatory at Berklee and has taught as a guest lecturer at many other colleges and universities.

JESSE HINSON* (Bassanio) is a Boston-based actor and violence designer. He is a Resident Acting Company member with Actors’ Shakespeare Project (ASP). ASP credits include Othello, The Tempest, As You Like It, Pericles, Henry VI Part 2, The Winter’s Tale, Twelfth Night, Antony and Cleopatra, and The Comedy of Errors. Other recent credits include The Thanksgiving Play (Lyric Stage), Shakespeare in Love (SpeakEasy Stage), and Cymbeline (Commonwealth Shakespeare). Jesse is an Associate Teaching Professor and the Undergraduate Coordinator for the Department of Theatre at Northeastern University.

L. ARKANSAS LIGHT* (Production Stage Manager) returns to Actors’ Shakespeare Project having previously stage managed Edward II, The Comedy of Errors, Macbeth, Medea, and The Hotel Nepenthe. Other stage management credits include: Murder on the Orient Express (ASM), Kiss of the Spiderwoman, Assassins, Never the Sinner, The Judas Kiss, No Way to Treat a Lady, And the World Goes ‘Round, Sideman, Inspecting Carol and The Curse of the Bambino (Lyric Stage Co); School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play, Once, Allegiance, The Bridges of Madison County, Significant Other, Bootycandy and Necessary Monsters (SpeakEasy Stage Co); Back the Night, Absence, Windowmen, Legally Dead, Mortal Terror, The River Was Whiskey (Boston Playwrights’ Theatre); Shear Madness (Charles Playhouse); and The Christmas Revels (Revels, Inc, Sanders Theatre). She has also worked locally with The Nora, Underground Railway, Bridge Rep, The Greater Boston Stage Company, Brandeis Theatre Company, and The Publick Theatre. She holds a B.A. from Mount Holyoke College and an M.A. from Purdue University.
NAEL NACER* (Shylock) Actors’ Shakespeare Project: Macbeth; Equivocation. Area credits include: The Tempest (Commonwealth Shakespeare); ChekhovOS, The Seagull (Arlekin Players Theatre); Romeo and Juliet, A Doll’s House, Bedroom Farce, Come Back, Little Sheba, Awake and Sing!, The Seagull, Our Town (Huntington Theatre); Small Mouth Sounds, A Future Perfect, Tribes (SpeakEasy Stage); The Return (Israeli Stage); Tiny Beautiful Things, True West, Bank Job, The Flick (Gloucester Stage); Constellations, Sila, Distracted (Central Square Theatre); Calendar Girls (Greater Boston Stage Company); Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play, Intimate Apparel, Animal Crackers (Lyric Stage); 45 Plays for 45 Presidents, It’s a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play (Merrimack Rep); A Number, Lungs, The Kite Runner, Pattern of Life (New Repertory Theatre); Rhinoceros, Windowmen (Boston Playwrights’ Theatre); and Shear Madness (Charles Playhouse). Nael is the recipient of Elliot Norton and IRNE awards for his work, and is a Resident Acting Company member of Actors’ Shakespeare Project, as well as a monologue coach with My College Audition.

JORDAN PALMER (Launcelot Gobbo) is humbled and thankful to return to in-person theater during this time of tectonic change. A hearty thanks to the cast, crew, and Igor for the immense love, generosity, and bravery they’ve brought to this project. Jordan graduated from The Boston Conservatory @ Berklee with a BFA in Contemporary Theater in 2019. She is the founding director of The Non-Binary Divers Shakespeare, a company dedicated to exploring Shakespeare through trans and non-binary subjectivity. Past roles include Titania in Dream, Love, Escape (The Ridiculous Project), C.R. in The Goddamn Tooney Lunes (Rat Queen Theatre Co.), various roles with Chamber Theatre Productions, and herself in her solo performance A Silly Poem in Three Silly Poems, which is currently in development. Dedicated to Kristin, and to all the girls who started too late, who have stood at the precipice of escape, faced Conscience and Fiend, and prevailed.

BETSY PIERCE* (Assistant Stage Manager) is excited to be working on her first production at ASP. Betsy is a freelance stage manager and carpenter. Stage Management: The Thanksgiving Play (ASM, Lyric Stage Company), Twelfth Night (ASM, Lyric Stage Company), A Story Beyond (SM, Liars and Believers), The Lyons (SM, Titanic Theatre Company), Nomad Americana (ASM, FreshInk), Hold These Truths (ASM, Lyric Stage Company), Murder for Two (Lyric Stage Company). Technical Director: Weston Drama Workshop, Nichole Canuso Dance Company. Carpenter: A.R.T., Boston Conservatory, Central Square Theater, Lyric Stage Company, Lantern Theatre Company, FringeArts, People’s Light Theatre Company. Betsy has a B.S. in Theater Arts from Skidmore College.

DENNIS TRAINOR JR* (Antonio) is proud to make his ASP debut. Boston area credits: Straight White Men and Picasso at the Lapin Agile (New Rep); In the Next Room or The Vibrator Play (SpeakEasy Stage); The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia? (Gloucester Stage); The Pain and the Itch (Company One); The Rainmaker (Foothills Theatre); November (Lyric Stage): The Seagull (The Publick). He is the author of the full-length plays Plug and I Coulda Been a Kennedy (Rude Mechanicals Theater Company) and a solo show, Manifest Destiny’s Child (Dixon Place + Wheelhouse Theater). Dennis was a founding co-Artistic Director of the New York-based Rude Mechanicals Theater Company. He is the Producer-Director-Writer of two documentaries: American Autumn and Legalize Democracy and the former host of the nationally syndicated news and politics program Acronym TV. Education: The American Conservatory Theater (MFA). He is an Associate Professor of Theater at Boston Conservatory at Berklee. Proud member of Actors’ Equity Association.

STEVE VIEIRA (Props Designer) is thrilled to be returning to the theatre in person for this long-awaited production! Steve is a Boston-based Production Manager, Designer, and Teaching Artist. Prior to joining Actors’ Shakespeare Project in 2019, Steve was the Production Manager at
Winthrop High School as well as the Theatre Manager at the Neil Shapiro Center for the Performing Arts. He has served on the Massachusetts Educational Theatre Guild High School Executive Council and spent six years as the Performing Arts Director at Pierce Camp Birchmont in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire. In addition to his work in the arts, Steve has been a Life Coach for young adults with disabilities and is an annual volunteer at Camp Fatima’s Exceptional Citizens Week. Steve holds a BFA in Stage Management from the Conservatory of Performing Arts at Point Park University.

PETER WALSH (Lorenzo) is a New York and Boston based actor, writer and improviser. He is thrilled to make his ASP debut with *The Merchant of Venice*! His regional theater credits include Ferdinand in *The Tempest* (Theater In The Open), Oak in *Joy Is Dead* (Brunch Theater), and Lionel in *Girl Power Sex Positive Joy Ride* (SheNYC). Peter received his BFA in acting from Boston University. He has also trained at the Double Edge Theater, the Upright Citizens Brigade, Squirrel Theater and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Endless love and thanks to his amazing family and friends. www.peter-walsh.com

GIGI WATSON* (Portia) is gratefully making her Actors’ Shakespeare Project debut! Many thanks to Igor, Chris, and the entire ASP team. Regional credits include *Hamlet* (Gloucester Stage), *Rhinoceros*, *Lenin’s Embalmers* (Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater), *Small Mouth Sounds*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (SpeakEasy Stage), *Brawler* (Boston Playwrights Theatre), *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Macbeth* (Brown Box Theatre Project), *Billy Elliot* (Wheelock Family Theatre), *Finish Line* (Boston Theater Company), and *Café Variations* (ArtsEmerson/SITI Company). Gigi is an acting/audition coach with My College Audition. She holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from Emerson College and is a proud member of Actors’ Equity Association.

KELSEY WHIPPLE (Assistant Stage Manager) is happy to be working with ASP again to bring this production back to life! Other credits include: virtual productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (Hub Theatre Company, SM/OBS Engineer), *Marriage of Figaro* (SM, Boston Opera Collaborative), *Mountain Language* (SM, Theatre on Fire); *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Abridged), *Pride and Prejudice, Much Ado About Nothing* (Actors’ Shakespeare Project, ASM): *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot, Steel Magnolias, The Clearing, Peter and the Starcatcher* (Hub Theatre Company, ASM). She is a graduate of Suffolk University with a BA in theater and an arts administration minor.

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Founded in 1913, AEA represents 45,000 actors, singers, dancers and stage managers across the United States and seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theater as an essential component of our society. AEA negotiates wages and working conditions and provides a wide range of benefits including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. For more information, visit www.actorsequity.org.
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Kate Kelly and Jeyrie Rodriguez – Covid Safety Officers
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Ben Lieberson – Technical Director
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Ksenya Litvak – Masks and Puppets
Alla Trachtenberg – Assistant Costume Designer
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SPECIAL THANKS

Igor Klimov
Anton Nikolayev
Sara Stackhouse
Michaila Cowie
The Boston Center for the Arts staff (former and present!)
And our incredibly loyal and supportive audiences who have waited a year and a half to see the show.
ASP runs year-round Education programming in Greater Boston:

- Residencies/Workshops for middle and high school students
- Residential programs in Department of Youth Services facilities
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**Fall 2021:** THE MERCHANT OF VENICE PROJECT
directed by Anneke Reich

**Winter-Spring 2022:** ROMEO AND JULIET
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**JULY SUMMER YOUTH INTENSIVE 2022:**
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For more info or to enroll, please visit our website or contact:
lindsay@actorsshakespeareproject.org
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