

## **Measure for Measure (2018) Concept Statement**

In 2018, the hot topics of debate among my community of IU theatre students were #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and the President undermining rule of law. My peers staged many projects about these issues, but often the calls to action never made it out of the performance spaces. Audiences typically consisting of likeminded theatre students left the performances patting themselves on the backs, and that was that. I felt an urgent need to challenge my community to follow through, to generate real, tangible, measurable change. To do so, I perceived that my community would benefit from a multifaceted examination of the topics at hand, rather than an ideological affirmation. After all, an idea cannot succeed by simply de-platforming its opposition. It must be capable of refuting and dismantling its opposition, it must be the best idea to rise above all others. So I launched *Measure for Measure*.

*Measure for Measure* is often labeled a “problem play” because it does not fit neatly into either category of comedy or tragedy. It deals with heavy themes of sexual assault, criminal justice, and rule of law, as a tragedy might. But it ends in marriage, which technically qualify it as a comedy by Shakespearean accounting. To a modern audience, however, it may be considered a problem play because it is highly problematic by modern standards of morality. The marriages are not consensual. Angelo’s marriage to Mariana is a criminal sentence dealt to Angelo without Mariana’s consent. The Duke’s marriage to Isabella is also decided without Isabella’s consent, as she conspicuously does not speak a single line following the Duke’s proposal. Of course, all of this arises out of the Duke’s stage management of the action of the play. As one who preaches the rule of law, he sure does bend the law to his own will, at others’ expense. These very timely themes and the problematic nature of *Measure for Measure* presented it as the perfect lens through which to challenge my community to take action.

I settled on a found theatre “Shakespeare in the Parking Lot” concept. I staged the play in public, on an outdoor loading dock adjoining the theatre facilities, to hopefully attract a more diverse audience. Consisting of a driveway, a raised platform for unloading truck-beds, and three garage doors, this loading dock happens to be situated in a high-traffic area of campus. The platform begged to be used as a naturally occurring stage, and its location presented the perfect opportunity to attract passers-by from all walks of life. I utilized a framing device, in which I presented the actors as if they were passers-by themselves. We invented a dumbshow to tell the story of these passers-by stumbling upon a box of costumes and props, then assuming their characters by donning their costumes and props, and entering into play with one another. As Duke Vincentio stage managed and monopolized the action of the play, his playmates became increasingly upset with him, until in the final moments, as the Duke forced his playmates past their moral limits, each actor threw off their costumes and quit the play, leaving the domineering Duke isolated with only his power for company.

I followed the opening performance with a panel talkback, to facilitate multifaceted discussion among audience members. Due of the subject matter of the play, it was important that the panelists were all women, and that the production dramaturg, also female, would lead the discussion. The panelists were: Kitty Liell, a distinguished local attorney and family friend; Shelli Yoder, a then-candidate for the Indiana State Senate; Leslie Fasone, Director of the IU Office for Sexual Violence Prevention and Victim Advocacy; and Lori Wolter Hudson, Artistic Director of the Indianapolis-based New Harmony Project.

Finally, I presented my community with an immediate opportunity to take action. I invited a representative of Hoosier Action, a non-partisan voting rights advocacy group, to raise a collection after each performance, benefitting the cause of securing a polling place on the IU campus.

The panel discussion was lively and successful, and we managed to raise about \$400 for Hoosier Action. From the standpoint of “empowering real, tangible, measurable change” though, there was much that I left on the table, and much that I will improve upon in the future. However, the project did have the inadvertent effect of creating a nexus between a wide variety of constituents in the IU and local communities, including: the Hutton Honors College, the Department of Theatre & Dance, the IU Auditorium and IU Cinema, Hoosier Action, Monroe County Civic Theatre, the Neal Marshall Black Culture Center, the Office of Student Life & Learning, and IU Facility Operations.