

A huge measure of success

KATHLEEN HAY

khay@standard-freeholder.com

PRESCOTT — Two of Shakespeare's most compelling, yet perhaps, most misunderstood female characters will come to life this summer in Prescott.

The Taming of the Shrew, which tells the tale of woe-begotten Katherine who must be married before her younger (and supposedly more beautiful) sister can say her vows, and Measure for Measure, which revolves around the seemingly pious Isabella, set the stage for the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival, July 11 to Aug. 15.

It's a matching that's resulted in a great deal of anticipation around the town, says the festival's artistic director.

"The Taming of the Shrew is the last well-known comedy we haven't done here yet," stated Ian Farthing, "but it's a crackin' good tale.

"As far as Measure for Measure, it's one of my favourite Shakespeare plays, but doesn't get done very often."

The pairing of the plays results in a balance he tries to achieve for the festival when selecting its playbill.

"Shrew is a comedy, but Measure is an intriguing comedy with dark edges, a dramedy as such," he said. "I think we're at the stage of development now where the audience trusts us, and knows the quality of our productions.

"They're willing to take a risk."

The festival is fortunate, too, to have been able to cast an equally brightly talented pair of actresses for the lead roles.

Emma Hunter (Isabella), was recently nominated for a 2008 Dora Mavor Moore Award (Outstanding Performance TYA) for her performance in the title role in The Incredible Speediness of Jamie Cavanaugh, produced by Roseneath Theatre in Toronto.

As well, Alix Sideris (Katherine) is no stranger to laurels for her theatrical abilities. This year she was nominated for a Rideau Award (Outstanding Performance - Female) for Empire Builders, while in 2007 she was also nominated in the same category for Betrayal. Both plays were pro-



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The St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival launches its second offering Measure for Measure on July 15 in Prescott at 7 p.m. The production stars Dora Award-nominated Emma Hunter, seen here, as its female lead, Isabella. The show runs concurrently with The Taming of the Shrew and will be performed until Aug. 15.

duced by Ottawa's Third Wall Theatre.

"It seems a little fast," said Hunter, a 2007 Queen's University drama graduate. "When David Craig, the artistic director of Roseneath called me, it felt surreal.

"I had no expectation at all. It's a real gift. It's a validation."

This marks the third season Hunter, who played the female lead in SLSF's production of

Romeo and Juliet two years ago, returns to Prescott. It is also the second time around for Sideris who captivated audiences as Rosalind in As You Like It last year.

"My experience has been so positive in Prescott, that I've told the world about it," Sideris stated. "It's a tiny town, but it's filled with people who yell 'Shakespeare!' in the middle of the street.

"They've really embraced it. If

people were like this in Ottawa, there wouldn't be the issue of funding."

Shrew has been set by Director Janet Irwin in the male-oriented society of 1950s Italy. Katherine, or Kate, is "completely like a fish out of water," explains Sideris, when talking about her character's disdain of the society's traditional values.

"She's forethinking, intelligent,

can't play games," said Sideris.

"I'm just beginning to discover her now. The beauty of rehearsals is that I feel like dipping my toes into a world of possibilities."

While Rosalind had a fear of abandonment, she continues, Kate is not necessarily fearing abandonment, but seeks to have a sense of belonging to something that's real to her.

She can't relate to the world around her, it doesn't make sense, but yet she longs to make a real connection.

"She's so beautiful, I love her so much," said Sideris. "I'm learning about a wonderful soul so capable of giving love.

"Someone who's so capable of gentleness."

Hunter finds her own character, Isabella, intriguing, too. Measure for Measure is considered a "problem play" she says, primarily because there are unanswered questions, while the lines of what constitutes good and evil are also blurred.

The play tells the story of Isabella, a beautiful yet pious virgin who is preparing to become a nun. Her brother, Claudio, is sentenced to death and Angelo - who holds the reins in this matter - will spare his life, but only if Isabella gives herself to him . . . but she won't.

"I've done extensive studies of Shakespeare, but I've never come into contact with Measure before," said the lead. "I think it's good though to attack a play on its own."

Hunter feels her character's piety is the result of an alternate struggle within herself, and that the true issue is her sexuality.

"I think she's trying to cut herself off," she said. "There's all kinds of things which don't fit the mold of a pious person.

"There are consistent references to her power, but what is this power? She's cute, good with words, and I think that's what she's running from."

The Taming of the Shrew opened July 11, while Measure for Measure opens July 15. All performances are held at the Kinsmen Amphitheatre, Sandra S. Lawn Harbour in Prescott. In event of rain, performances are relocated indoors.