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Mine is Yours presented "Women Beware Women" Jacobean tragedy in Los Angeles

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Closing this past weekend, Mine is Yours theatre company presented the rarely performed Jacobean tragedy by Thomas Middleton "Women Beware Women." This play includes strong women placed in difficult positions. It reveals also the misfortune of living in a world dominated by men yet shows the flip side of the tragedy of being a [woman](#) with power. Published in 1657, this play did not become popular until after the 1950s, perhaps because of the strength of the female characters ahead of its time.

The story involves a rich young woman, Bianca (Haley Brown), who elopes with a poor man Leantio (Dane Oliver). Leantio has his mother (Victoria Hoffman) keep Bianca hidden away, which in this interpretation seems to be to protect Bianca and proves to be a valid reason as the Duke (Christopher Salazar) sees her and covets her for his own. Kudos to [casting](#) for selecting women who do not appear to be stick models but attractive healthy real women.

Several of the male roles are double booked lending to interesting scene changes on stage sometimes mid scene. Dane Oliver played both Leantio and a ward seeing a wife, thus being both doting husband and a character described as an idiot. Robert Paterno plays both the Guardiano, the ward's uncle seeking a wife for him, and Cardinal upset with the improper actions of the Duke. Christopher Salazar plays not just the Duke, but the father of the girl Isabella (Chelsea Niven) sought as the bride of the Ward.

There are two love stories in this drama interwoven together. At the heart of the second plot rests a woman, Livia, played by Sarah Hollis. Think Zoe Saldana cast as a Desperate Housewife widower with power and money. Sarah Hollis plays the protector and manipulator, especially when her character finds that Livia's brother Hippolito loves his own niece Isabella potentially betrothed to the Ward. Later it is revealed that Livia falls for Leantio married to Bianca using her wealth to push for what she desires. Confused? Somehow this cast makes this story comprehensible.

This was a play focused on Women and all the female leads did a fantastic job playing dual roles,

even though not double cast. Haley Brown as Bianca went from doting sweet wife to devious killer. Chelsea Niven as Isabella did a charming job as both the sweet innocent girl and devious lover to her own uncle planning to wed for wealth, though the relationship with her uncle not as tainted as appears.

The director Sam Szabo did an amazing job of telling a very complex story with only nine actors, and twelve characters in a tight space. The character changes ingenious and well choreographed as were numerous on stage fight scenes. Several of the fight scenes between the Ward and his Man Sordido (James Ferrero) seemed placed to emphasize their relationship and to also act as a means for Dane Oliver to switch from Ward to Leantio and back again. The actual setting consisted of one large square room with the audience in chairs lining three sides putting the action in the center of the room as opposed to the end.

The play used a device well known in stories of the day, a play within a play, yet this version made clear that the Women were the focus of the performance and the key players on the stage. Well done, and crafted, and clear.

For more information on the [Mine is Yours Theater company see their website.](#)

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