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| **For Immediate Release** |
| February 28, 2019 |
| Jeanne Harrison [703-987-1712](tel:(703)%20987-1712) [jeharrison@travelingplayers.org](mailto:jeharrison@travelingplayers.org) |
| ***Merchant of Venice* Seeks Peace:**  **Teens perform Shakespeare’s “anti-Semitic play”**  **Peace Educator of the Year leads post-show discussion** |
| McLean, VA - [Traveling Players Ensemble](https://travelingplayers.org/) performs *The Merchant of Venice*, followed by a discussion led by American University Professor [Barbara Wien](https://www.arlingtonmagazine.com/how-to-make-peace-not-war/), on Sunday, March 17 at The Madeira School.  *The Merchant of Venice*, one of Shakespeare’s comedies, is infamous for its troubling portrayal of Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. On the surface, Shylock is the villain of the play, attempting to exact a brutal revenge on a business rival.  On the other hand, Shakespeare also portrays Shylock sympathetically, at one point invoking the famous “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech to underline his shared humanity with the Christian characters of the play, a radical idea in Shakespeare’s time. This layered and contradictory portrayal has perplexed scholars and theatre practitioners for centuries.    In order to address the play’s themes and history, Traveling Players has invited Professor Barbara Wien to discuss Shakespeare’s play with the cast, director, and audience in light of the current rise in antisemitism.  Professor Wien has worked to end human rights abuses, violence and war.  She is a practitioner-scholar with extensive knowledge of sustainable peace agreements and best practices in ending gender-based violence.  Her many credits include working for the US Institute for Peace and leading V-Day, the organization founded by Tony Award-winning actor and playwright Eve Ensler to end violence against women.  She moderates the Middle East Peace Cafes offered by Busboys and Poets.    Traveling Players Ensemble is dedicated to teaching Shakespeare to teenagers through performance, and creating dialogue with the larger community by touring its plays to groups particularly invested in a specific theme. For example, the tour of *Merchant of Venice* includes the Jewish Community Center’s Ring House in Rockville, with a post-show discussion moderated by Jewish Spiritual Leader Hassan Sabrina Sojourner.  “I’ve always been scared of this play,” says Artistic Director Jeanne Harrison, “and after the shootings at Tree of Life in Pittsburg, I nearly cancelled. Everything felt so raw. But that also makes it the perfect time to talk about anti-Semitism. Teens need strategies to create peace and protect the vulnerable in an increasingly tribal world. We all do. Perhaps this troubling play can provide healing?”  Harrison says she finally decided that now was the right time to perform this play based on the support the idea received from the Jewish cast members and parents.  Says Harry Stevens, the high school senior portraying Shylock, “To me, *Merchant of Venice* offered an opportunity to directly confront and discuss the antisemitism, which has always been present, but is now more visible. To not do this play would be an admission that rather than addressing these issues, we'd prefer to shirk away from them."  The public performance takes place on Sunday, March 17 in the Chapel Auditorium at The Madeira School, at [8328 Georgetown Pike, McLean, VA 22102](https://maps.google.com/?q=8328+Georgetown+Pike,+McLean,+VA+22102&entry=gmail&source=g).  The play is part of a [Festival](https://travelingplayers.org/performances/), which begins at 3 p.m. with *Alice in Wonderland*, recommended for ages 6-12, followed by *The* *Merchant of Venice* at 4: 15 p.m., recommended for ages 10 and up. Tickets are $10 at the door; children under 6 are $5.  Presented by Traveling Players Ensemble's high school students, the play features the talents of Maria Cannon (Chevy Chase, MD), Katie Conner (Fairfax, VA), Rebecca Connor (Fairfax Station, VA), Amanda Guzman Romero (Brambleton, VA), Oscar Linehan-Siu (Arlington, VA), Ariel Noble (Clifton, VA), Erin Sharpe (Vienna, VA), Brianna Shelton (Sterling, VA), Harry Stevens (Arlington, VA), Eleanor Tucker (Washington, DC), and Paul Weaver (Falls Church, VA).  Directed by Jeanne E. Harrison, with set and costume designs by Adalia Tonneyck.    Traveling Players Ensemble is best known for its award-winning summer theatre camps, in residence since 2007 at The Madeira School, which train teens and pre-teens in classical theatre and then take them on tour to perform their shows.  Registration is still open for summer camp, for current 3rd through 12th graders. Auditions are required for pre-professional programs – an option for high school students. The next round of auditions is April 7, following the Open House.  Since 2003, the company has performed "Shakespeare in the Park" in Shenandoah National Park, as well as Colonial Williamsburg, Lime Kiln Theater and many other locations.  Traveling Players was selected by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) as one of 25 model summer arts programs in the nation for its comprehensive and intensive curriculum.  For more information, visit [www.travelingplayers.org](http://www.travelingplayers.org/) or call [703-987-1712](tel:(703)%20987-1712).  ### |