

# THE PRESS



**Review: *Cymbeline*, York Shakespeare Project, Merchant Taylors' Hall, York, March 3**

By [Charles Hutchinson](#)

YORK Shakespeare Project is closing in on the finale to its 20-year mission to perform all 37 of Shakespeare's plays.

Still to come are *Macbeth*, *Antony & Cleopatra* and the 2020 farewell of *The Tempest*, which left *Cymbeline* as the last of the lesser-spotted works to be enacted.

Ben Prusiner, the *New Yorker* who has made such an impact on York's classical theatre world, is soon to leave the city for a Masters degree in theatre directing in Bristol and a festival director's post at the Rose in London, but not before he brought his customary scholarly zeal and boundless enthusiasm for the Bard to *Cymbeline*.

Pragmatically, it was restricted to a three-day run but all five performances, including the late addition of a Sunday night finale, attended by the York civic party, all sold out.

Myriad locations have served the YSP cause these past 19 years, the latest being the Merchant Taylors' Hall in Aldwark, rarely open to the public but here accommodating a thrust production with seating on three sides. Plush carpet, beams, high roof, chandelier lights, it has grandeur and good sightlines but is not wholly compliant to theatre. Harsh light from above rather than theatre lighting must suffice, dimmed briefly for a nocturnal scene. More variety would have been beneficial.

Prusiner favoured Renaissance dress this time and proper sword-fighting in the cloak and dagger tradition to boot, while the text and characterisation held sway over bold theatrical imagination. That made sense, given how the building imposed its own character.

Roles retained their gender but plenty originally played by men now carried new clout in women's hands, notably Emma Scott's troubled Posthumus Leonatus, Elizabeth Elsworth's intransigent King *Cymbeline* and Carrie Morrison's loose cannon Prince Cloten.

Rosy Rowley's scheming Queen, Jim Patterson's equally scheming Iachimo and Bronte Jane Hobson's heroic Princess Imogen all excelled, and as the tragic-comedy's balance swung more to comedy, Rowley's Morgan, Thomas Leadbeater and Sonia Di Lorenzi came to the fore. Praise too for the beautiful a cappella 16th century music throughout, led by Steve Griffiths and Tracey Rea.