

Shakespeare & Company
Hamlet National Tour 2008-2009
Program Notes and Info template

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Mandatory Program titles and credits:

Shakespeare & Company (logo)
Presents
Hamlet
National Tour 2008-09
By William Shakespeare
Directed by Eleanor Holdridge

Cast:

Hamlet	Jason Asprey
Claudius	Nigel Gore
Gertrude	Tina Packer
Polonius; a priest	Dennis Krausnick
Laertes	Kevin O'Donnell
Horatio	Jake Waid
Ophelia	Elizabeth Raetz
Ghost; Player King; gravedigger	Johnny Lee Davenport
Rosencrantz; Fortinbras	Alexander Sovronsky
Guildestern; Osric	Jacob H Knoll

Set Designer	Edward Check
Lighting Designer	Les Dickert
Costume Designer	Jessica Ford
Composer/ Sound Designer	Scott Killian
Assistant Lighting Designer	Chris Thielking
Fight Choreographer	Kevin G. Coleman
Stage Manager	Nicole Bouclier
Production Assistant/Props	Nate Beckman
Assistant to the Director	Kelly Galvin
Voice Coach	Lizzie Ingram
Wardrobe	Diedre Bollinger
Sound Engineer	Chris Ratay
Fight Captain	Alexander Sovronsky

The Actors and Stage Manager employed in this production are members of Actors Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States. (with logo as provided)

The Director is a member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, an independent national labor union. (with logo as provided)

Shakespeare & Company operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Shakespeare & Company is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for American theatre, and the Shakespeare Theatre Association of America

While in the theatre, please turn off all electronic devices such as beepers, cell phones and watches. No photography or recording of any kind is permitted.

Exclusive Tour Representation
Rena Shagan Associates, Inc.
16A West 88th St.
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www.shaganarts.com

Press Release info and review blurbs:

“Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell.”

In 2006 Shakespeare & Company presented a defining interpretation of *Hamlet* on our mainstage, with a cast that included Artistic Director Tina Packer as Queen Gertrude, her husband, the writer, director and Shakespeare text expert Dennis Krausnick as Polonius and her son Jason Asprey in the title role. The strong casting, combined with their in-depth training, remarkable adherence and commitment to Shakespeare’s language resulted in a production that crackles with raw emotion and authentic, heartfelt energy.

The Boston Globe called the production “Lean, taut, intelligent...thought provoking.” Frank Rich from *Variety.com* called the production, “lively, galvanizing, bold.” *The New York Times* praised Shakespeare & Company as “the invaluable and indefatigable troupe that prides itself on clarity interpreting the canon...and to speak the speech so clearly and comprehendingly that even theatergoers new to Shakespeare grasp the plot and characters.”

The resounding success of *Hamlet* is, in large measure, a result of the commitment to the Company’s founding principles. This “revved up, pared down”, eloquent, post-modern production has unanimous appeal and is enthusiastically received by all audiences, from professional critics and Shakespeare scholars to more casual Shakespeare aficionados and those freshly introduced to the canon.

“Speak the speech, I pray you..”

Review blurbs:

Entertaining crackle...works splendidly.. intriguingly thoughtful...terrific fun to watch...truly exciting...

The New York Times

Sharply intelligent, lean and taut...ingenious and thought-provoking...

The Boston Globe

Fresh line readings and directorial touches that light up Shakespeare’s lines like fireworks in the summer night...Outstanding performances...

The Wall Street Journal

Synopsis:

A dead king is all-too-quickly succeeded by his brother, who then hastily marries his widowed sister-in-law. Hamlet suspects treachery, and when his father's ghost appears and tells him he was murdered, Hamlet promises violent revenge. So begins his struggle between moral integrity and the need for vengeance in a corrupt world.

Arguably the most famous and most quoted play in the English language, *Hamlet* not only altered the course of Shakespeare's artistic evolution, but the history of theatre itself. In a straightforward plot of a morally upright son confronting betrayal and treachery, Shakespeare created a gripping, timeless portrayal of humanity's struggle with two opposing forces, moral integrity and the compulsion for vengeance. The play marked the discovery of the inwardness and introspection of character, a milestone in dramatic art, and, in many respects, lay the foundations of modern persona.

The first literary work to take an unflinching look at the duplicity of modern life, it truly shaped concepts of humanity in Western thought and in many aspects created the language we speak today, and thus our conception and understanding of ourselves. It was the first attempt in the dramatic arts to portray an ordinary person questioning the futility, immorality and wrongs in life, and to not only ask germane questions but to convey answers that apply to real life.

Four hundred years later *Hamlet* remains both a start point and a high point in modern theatre, and is often called the most important play ever written. The depth of its conflict and introspection is as universal as any work in theatre gets.

Shakespeare & Company is proud to present this cutting edge interpretation of Shakespeare's defining masterpiece, and to introduce these characters, conflicts and questions to a new generation of Americans.

Director's Notes by Eleanor Holdridge

Hamlet is perhaps the most incredibly tortured, intelligent and facile character that Shakespeare ever conceived. Much has been made of his "tragic flaw" and his lack of action. But what draws me to the play is his relentless and very active pursuit of self-knowledge and his rigorous exploration of what it is to be human. He is not content to live within the form of his given society or even the form of his own play.

A thinking man with a well of conscience, exploring in absolute every ramification of every decision, it is likely that Hamlet would make a terrible ruler. Claudius and Gertrude, as they quickly and concisely make decisions on domestic and foreign policy and homeland security--causing the deaths of the innocent--are perhaps stronger leaders. But which is a better ruler for the country's prosperity and which is a better ruler for the conscience of the society? Which is better for the heart of the individual? Shakespeare's questions, posed over 400 years ago seem to be at the heart of our continuing human debate.

Hamlet is a man who is struggling not only with his conscience, but also a man trying to discover his political and personal responsibilities in the world. The questions are eternal. Do we take revenge or seek another course? And if we follow our own vengeance and sense of personal retribution, what is the outcome and how do we take responsibility for what we've done.

I believe that one of the greatest achievements of Shakespeare's great art is that he poses the essential ontological questions not in a removed and intellectual manner, but with all the power and messiness of human emotion, wedding the probings of the human mind with the longings of the human heart.

Although I have conceived a production that centers the play in Hamlet's brain in his last few dying moments, it is the man's passion and heart with which I am most concerned. Although Hamlet could be a terrible King, a bad boyfriend, a quixotic friend, a sullen and brooding son he is also a man who wants to do what is right, to live up to the dictates of his father and his conscience and yet be true to himself. A very human being.

Scene list

Prologue, (in this production a montage of lines from play). Images from Hamlet's life flash through his brain.

1.1 (Cut from this production, in which Bernardo, Marcellus and Horatio encounter a Ghost.)

1.2 Court scene, in which Claudius announces marriage, states the current foreign policy with Norway and Fortinbras and potential conflict, grants Laertes his wish to go abroad to study.

1.3 Polonius family says goodbye to Laertes and gives him advice, Laertes leaves and Polonius tries to find out relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia.

1.4& 1.5 (in this production this is one scene)

Hamlet and Horatio on the battlements, meet with ghost who tells Hamlet that Claudius has killed him and asks for revenge.

2.1 Polonius gives Ophelia advice regarding Hamlet

2.2 Gertrude and Claudius greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet meets them and the traveling Player enters scene.

3.1 Claudius and Gertrude grill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern regarding Hamlet, Polonius gets Ophelia to spurn Hamlet with the adults watching, Hamlet enters and ponders existence, "to be or not to be," Hamlet spurns Ophelia, adults decide that Hamlet is mad.

3.2 Hamlet plans with Horatio to present play to ascertain if Claudius is guilty, Hamlet gets Claudius and Gertrude to enact the play, "the Mousetrap" with the Player. Claudius becomes enraged and leaves, the party is broken up.

3.3 Claudius tells Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to seek out Hamlet, Claudius alone tries to pray, Hamlet enters and sees Claudius praying and considers killing the now-proven-guilty King but will not while he is praying and could go to heaven. Ironically Claudius can not find the spirit to pray.

3.4 Polonius comes to Gertrude's bedroom or "closet," hiding when Hamlet enters. Hamlet berates his mother, stabs Polonius behind curtain, then tries to get his mother to abjure Claudius, at which point the Ghost enters, reminding Hamlet of his promise not to hurt his mum.

4.1 Claudius enters Gertrude's closet, questions her, and she tells him Hamlet has killed Polonius. Claudius asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet and Polonius' body.

4.2 and 4.3 (as one scene in this production) Hamlet enters, announcing the body of Polonius is stowed. Claudius enters demanding where body of Polonius is, Claudius sends Hamlet to England and when he is gone engages Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to carry letter that will effect Hamlet's death in England.

Intermission

4.4 Hamlet and Guildenstern see Fortinbras on the march towards Denmark, Hamlet considers what he would be like if he were Fortinbras and ponders the essence of his own humanity.

4.5 Gertrude reveals to Horatio that Ophelia has gone mad after the death of her father, Ophelia comes on singing, Laertes enters enraged revealing that he has come back to revenge his father, grieves over his sisters madness.

4.6 (in this production) Horatio reads letters that Hamlet sent to say he is coming home and that he has escaped England to travel with pirates and that Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern continue toward England.

4.7 Claudius calms Laertes down and manipulates him so that Laertes will move against Hamlet, to entice him to a duel and poison him. Gertrude enters to reveal that Ophelia has drowned.

5.1 Hamlet and Horatio enter and catch up on all that has happened. They talk with a gravedigger who muses on transient state of man. Funeral procession enters and Hamlet, realizing that it is Ophelia, jumps on the grave. He and Laertes fight over her grave and are split up.

5.2 Hamlet regrets his anger toward Laertes to Horatio. Osric enters to propose a gentlemanly bout of swordplay between Hamlet and Laertes. Hamlet accepts. The court meets and the swordplay begins. Claudius puts poison in a ceremonial cup which is mistakenly drunken by Gertrude. Laertes takes the tip off his poisoned sword and wounds Hamlet, but the swords are switched and Laertes, too, is wounded. Gertrude dies. Laertes reveals Claudius was behind poison and dies. Hamlet kills Claudius and dies in the arms of Horatio. Fortinbras enters and Horatio asks that his story be told.

The Essence of Shakespeare & Company

"Shakespeare & Company continues to be one of the best troupes in Massachusetts, but the consistency was particularly impressive this year. Tina Packer and her Lenox-based company not only make Shakespeare our earthy contemporary but they also bring a classic elegance to contemporary plays..."
The Boston Globe

What it means to be alive.

Shakespeare & Company was founded in 1978 by Tina Packer, its current Artistic Director and President. British-born and an acclaimed artist with the Royal Shakespeare Company, Packer came to the U.S. with a desire to merge the powerful techniques of both British and American actors: the clarity of the spoken word and the use of the physical body. Since its founding in Lenox, MA, originally at Edith Wharton's villa *The Mount*, and now housed on a 30 acre campus, Shakespeare & Company has always been committed to creating theatre of unprecedented excellence rooted in the classical ideals of inquiry, balance and harmony; as the Elizabethans did, in love with poetry, physical prowess and the mysteries of the universe. With a core of over 120 artists, the company performs Shakespeare and discovers, develops and produces new works of literary, social and political significance, such as *Ethan Frome*, *Golda's Balcony* and *Martha Mitchell Calling*.

The Company also provides a unique discipline of classical training to professional actors. Over 4,000 professional actors have studied at Shakespeare & Company, including Richard Dreyfuss, Alicia Silverstone, Bill Murray, Rebecca DeMornay, Sigourney Weaver, Olympia Dukakis, Lauren Ambrose, Keanu Reeves and many, many others.

Each year Shakespeare & Company's Education Program introduces over 60,000 students throughout the New England and New York areas to the works of Shakespeare and is frequently recognized and awarded by national organizations such as the MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and numerous corporate and private foundations for leadership in the field of arts-in-education.

Whether in performance, education or training, the Company operates with a singular, overarching mission: To give audiences, professional participants and students everywhere in America an opportunity to discover, investigate and explore the three vital questions at the heart of each of Shakespeare's works:

What does it mean to be alive?

*How should we act?
What must I do?*

Now in its 31th year, Shakespeare & Company has accomplished its founding mission several times over and earned a reputation of international prominence, to become one of the foremost centers of Shakespeare learning, training and performance in the world.