

## Review Title

Carl F Gauze, Archikulture Digest, February 1, 2010

This show opened with the absolute best “Hamlet’s Father’s Ghost on the Parapet” I’ve seen since Brian Blessed walked into that Pepsi machine way back in 1996. “Hamlet” remains the most malleable work in Shakespeare’s catalog and director Richard Width take this version in some obvious but very fulfilling directions. Hamlet (Clark) took some time to grow on me, but while he simmered, the rest of the Elsinore court mimed an honest, upright government as they deftly swept any controversy about legitimacy into the moat. The story is timeless – a



with Stafford Clark-Price

carefully plotted assassination sweeps Claudius (Zivot) into power, he marries the comely widow Gertrude (Hering) to cement his position, and he calls Hamlet back from civilization and higher education so he can keep an eye on

him. Before long Claudius regrets that move – Hamlet smelled a corpse and faked insanity to buy time for his vengeance, but pays the price. All these machinations turn Denmark into a Norwegian client state which is an insult that today’s political junkies might not fully grasp.

So how is this evening different from all others? Neither Claudius nor Gertrude feel evil until the second act, **Polonius (Steve Hendrickson) not only gets laughs, but appears as an elegant and caring father**, and the expensive imported talent (Johnny Lee Davis) gets some relatively minor roles. Davis plays Dad’s Ghost, the Grave Digger, and the Player King. He invests each of these roles with more



with Marni Penning

power and depth than in previous productions giving the show a fresh perspective. The opening ghost raises him in a cloud of fog from the mid-stage trap door to chase the night guards hither and yon until Hamlet confronts him. Later, Davenport steals the “Alas, poor Yorkic” scene from Hamlet, and as the Player King, he neatly riffs off the plaintive cry of a small child up in the cheap seats. Another crowd favorite was “Osric, A Flamboyant Courtier” played by the always flexible Brandon Roberts. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Michael Gill and Regan McLellan, not necessarily in that order) were delightfully interchangeable, playing off the opposing Stoppard production downtown.

In the various Hamlets I’ve witnessed over the years directors made him clever, insane, befuddled, and generally rather wooden. This version makes him more human, but more importantly makes the rest of his world more human as well. Caricatures are downplayed, motivations clarified, and the result is a crusading young man who changes his world and dies for his troubles. It’s a glorious martyrdom, a martyrdom that perhaps loses his country’s sovereignty but protects it from the local bad guy. In his own way, Hamlet is more vital and moral than any of the 20th century Good Government provocateurs. He’s not the sort of person you’re likely to see in office in these parts; even if there are more than a few people downtown who ought to duel with poisoned swords and wine cups.