



The prince remains a king of the theater

Seth Kubersky, Orlando Weekly, February 3, 2010



William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is arguably the most widely known work of Western literature (next to the Bible) and the best-known play in history. What's the point of summarizing a story that almost everyone alive has already seen, if not onstage then onscreen (starring Oliver, Gibson or Simba)?

If you're in the dark about *Hamlet*, allow me to recommend *Slings and Arrows*, the brilliant Canadian television comedy that's set backstage at the barely



with Avery Clark

fictional New Burbage Theatre Festival. The first-season DVD features all the archetypes familiar to anyone who has been knee-deep in nonprofit theater – arrogant actors, exploited ingénues, boneheaded board members and a clinically insane artistic director – as they stumble through a production of *Hamlet*. After watching, you'll have a much better appreciation for Orlando Shakespeare Theater's version of the tragedy.

With an aesthetic updated to the late 19th century, cinematically seamless scene transitions and excellent articulation all around, OST's production should appeal even to those who aren't normally Bard buffs. From the opening scene, in which the king's ghost levitates out of the floor in a sea of fog, to the final fencing duel, director Richard Width has crafted a supremely theatrical show stocked with energy and accessibility, which is appropriate for a play about the transformative power of play-acting. **He's found humor in places both expected (Michael Gill's Guildenstern and Regan McLellan's Rosencrantz) and unexpected ([Steve Hendrickson's](#) Polonius, not a trivial fool but wittily self-aware).**

And while the expert pacing makes it feel less than its three hours, Width has edited surgically, sparing often-axed lines from the Player King and "Gravedigger 1" (the wonderful Johnny Lee Davenport).

Of course, the play rests on the treacherous trio at its center. Eric Zivot plays Claudius as a polished politician, his smoothed-back hair hiding the banality of evil. The ever-excellent Anne Hering is given some interesting extra-textual blocking moments to motivate her enigmatic Gertrude.

As the titular prince, New York actor Avery Clark emphasizes his antic disposition. No emo moper, this "man of action" Hamlet would be Baker Acted today. Clark tosses books, leaps off benches and soliloquizes while swinging from the balcony rail. It could all be considered "over the top," but can't be called boring. OST's production isn't the brainiest or most affecting *Hamlet* I've ever seen, but it is among the most entertaining.

— Seth Kubersky



with Marni Penning