

Murder. Incest. Suicide. Ghosts. Revenge. No, I am not describing the latest episode of "The Hills", but rather William Shakespeare's 400-year-old triumph d'art, "Hamlet." I can assure you that the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre's rendition of the timeless psychological thriller is far better than anything you will see on television tonight.

For those who do not remember it from high school, "Hamlet" is the woeful tale of the young prince of Denmark and his destructive quest to avenge his father's murder. After his uncle, Claudius, marries his recently widowed mother, Hamlet is propelled into a fit of sorrow, claiming to be the only person in the kingdom mourning his father's passing.

His anger is stirred when the ghost of his father appears, telling Hamlet he was murdered by his brother, now Hamlet's stepfather. The ghost then implores Hamlet to avenge his untimely end. Thus,



Hamlet sets out to kill Claudius, pausing every few scenes to ponder the meaning of life and declare his angst. The show ends in a bloodbath, with four characters meeting their end in the course of five minutes.

Now, I would not consider myself a fan of the classics (AP English ruined that for me long ago), but for those who are weary of anything predating 1970, I cannot stress enough how different plays are when performed instead of read. Director Richard Width's "Hamlet" at the Orlando Shakespeare



Theatre is superb in all aspects and promises to deliver an exciting evening for all in attendance.

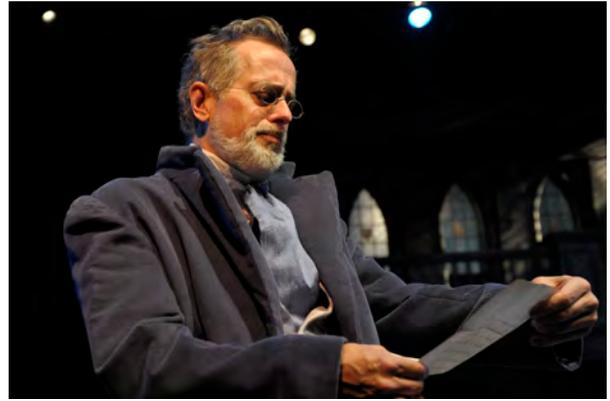
Theatrically speaking, the play is top-notch. One of the wonderful things about ambiguous texts such as "Hamlet" is the freedom of choice it gives the actors. "Hamlet" can never be played the same way twice. OST newcomer Avery Clark shines in the title role, choosing an approach that ranges from neurotic to disturbing, and is simply fun to watch.

Although he is best showcased in his interactions with other characters, his soliloquies are delivered artfully, highlighting the deep and contemplative sentiments without losing the whiny flare of adolescence that is so integral to the character. He is seldom overtaken by the weight of his role. Anne Herring, a perennial star on the Orlando stage, went with a more conscious and active Gertrude, a choice that certainly paid off in an engaging and troubling final scene. Claudius, portrayed by Rollins College

Professor Eric Zivot, provides an experience in his own right. The intonation and care he brings to the words are truly moving, bringing to light the art in the language without forsaking its purpose or alienating the audience, which is too often the case in Shakespearean performances. **Surprisingly memorable was [Steve Hendrickson](#), who, as Polonius, showcased the humor and humanity in the piece, taking a typically forgettable character and making him one of the highlights of the evening.**



The show starts off with a technical bang, using all the tricks and traps of the stage to transport the audience to the world of Hamlet. Bob Phillips' set is masterfully designed; part of the evening's fun is watching the scenery morph into whatever is required. The use of actors dressed as maids and butlers to move set pieces and dressings added a wonderful touch, always leaving the illusion unbroken. Sound, run by Matthew Given, is minimal but effective, never overshadowing the piece. Denise Warner's choice of costumes is puzzling, however.



While the jewel tones add beautifully to the demure mood, the period choices are more reminiscent of "A Christmas Carole" than "Hamlet." Fortunately, they do not detract from the piece, and the costume of The Player Queen (Alea Figouera, class of 2009) is beautiful. The lighting, designed by Bert Scott, is extremely successful, blending texture and color artfully to connect the audience emotionally and immediately transport them into the realms of Wittenberg.



Overall, Width presents a unified and moving experience that excites, engages and entertains its audiences far better than the best English teacher or movie ever could. If you are looking for a great night out in the Winter Park area, "Hamlet" is certainly the show to see. With classic lines such as, "To be or not to be," and "Neither a borrower nor lender be," "Hamlet" is to theatre what "The Godfather" is to film.