

Arts & Entertainment

Performances maintain balance of Shakespeare

By David Thompson

*He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid
speech;*

*Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze in-
deed*

The very faculties of eyes and ears.
Hamlet

If an actor wants to do Shakespeare well, he must walk a narrow line. On one

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side of this line fall the actors who get lost in the rhythm and flamboyance of Shakespeare's poetry. Their manner is so artificial that they may as well be reading out of a cookbook. On the other side of the line are the actors who pour their heart and soul into every "forsooth" and "prithee" and drown the role with their excesses. To be good, an actor must maintain a balance be-

tween authenticity and indulgence. In the theater department's production of *Hamlet*, appearing until May 1, there are enough actors maintaining their balance on that tightwire to make the evening enjoyable and worthwhile.

That balance is especially important for the character of Hamlet, because the entire play depends on him. If he falls, he pulls the play down with him. Christopher Darga's performance as the troubled young man is well done and holds the play up, but he slides out onto the tightwire a little too quickly. Darga does not consider carefully enough the development of the character as the play moves forward. As the plot develops, Hamlet's mood and tone should fluctuate more than we see on stage.

Despair

First, Hamlet is mourning his father's death. Then he encounters his father's ghost and is ordered to seek his revenge. Then he becomes tormented that he does not revenge his father's death quickly enough. His mind is filled with "a thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom and ever three parts coward." These are all signs marking the character's

slow descent into despair. Hamlet gives a soliloquy at each of these stages, and Darga does not differentiate enough between them. He proceeds directly to "drown the stage with tears" and leaves little for the rest of the play.

This flood flows mainly in Hamlet's soliloquies, however, and when Hamlet is talking with other characters, Darga is more restrained. He does an excellent job with Hamlet's moods when other characters are involved. One scene that particularly stands out is the scene in which Hamlet comes upon Claudius, his father's murderer, praying, and he contemplates killing him. The staging of the speeches of Hamlet and Claudius is most effective. Darga is also good at displaying Hamlet's skillful humor and his clever taunting of the people around him who think him mad.

Humor

Humor is found throughout this play, and this production succeeds at bringing that out. Aside from Hamlet's repartee, there are the senile bumbblings of Polonius and the happy old gravedigger to make the audience laugh in the midst of all the pathos. Philip Stone's performance as Polonius is endearing, and his charm provides a marked contrast in mood to another equal-

ly good performance, that of Stephen Gaines as Claudius, the stern, murderous king. These two gentlemen, along with Hamlet, are the pivotal characters. The three of them succeed, along with a few other good performers, at keeping the play aloft and beautiful in its flight, as only Shakespeare can be.

They are aided by a fine set, designed by Cynthia M. Zuby. Three-dimensional, sculpture-like panels are used as the walls of the castle for all the scenes. They are slid around the stage in varying, effective arrangements. The dark surfaces of these panels reflect the complex, pensive tone of the play. Authentic reflections of the play are also achieved by Clare Briggs' costumes. From Hamlet's dark doublet to Ophelia's flowing white to the regal dress of the king and queen, the costumes reach across the play's range in moods.

Despite a few indelicacies in performances, this production of *Hamlet* succeeds at maintaining the balance that Shakespeare demands. What flaws there are with lack or excess of emotion can be overlooked, and the play can be enjoyed. For those who have yet to penetrate Hamlet's murky depths, this production will keep sufficiently entertained "the very faculties of eyes and ears."

Graduate student acts his own way in role of Hamlet

By Ward W. Triplett III

Do the names Richard Burlage, Edwin Booth or John Barrymore mean anything to you? What about Lawrence Olivier, Richard Burton or recent Academy Award winner John Gielgud? How about Christopher Darga?

Theater fans undoubtedly will recognize Olivier, Barrymore and Burton as the most famous of Hamlets, as all three have played the role of the vengeful prince of Denmark. Gielgud, Burlage and Booth have also played Hamlet, although their performances were on stage, not film.

Fans of the University Theater no doubt will recognize Darga from his previous roles: The swashbuckling romantic Don Felix in *Beware of Still Waters*, the teary director Carlton Fitzgerald in *Light Up the Sky* and the troubled Father Rivard in *The Runner Stumbles*.

Now Darga is starring in the latest University Theater production, *Hamlet*. He not only has to prepare for his role, he also has to be wary that people have a tendency to compare Hamlets.

"It is really *the* role," the graduate student from Detroit, Mich., said. "When I first got the role, I was thrilled. But then I began to think, Burton, Olivier, Gielgud... how could I possibly compare with them?"

But when Darga began to work on the Hamlet role six weeks ago with the rest of the cast, he decided to ignore what was said about those playing Hamlet before him and do it his way.

"I told myself that it didn't matter if I compared to those people at all," Darga said. "This is my opportunity to play this role, and it will be my interpretation of it, not anybody else's."

"Hamlet is one of the greatest roles you can ever play, because there are so many different ways to do it. This would just be my way," he said.

Darga's Hamlet is different than, for example, Burton's. Unlike Burton, Darga is a calmer figure throughout the production, and most of this is on purpose. For the famous speech that begins "To be or not to be," Darga intentionally avoids any show-stopping dramatics.

"The director (William Morgan) and I definitely didn't want the slow, dramatic, important speech. We decided that since I was reading anyway, why not just make it sound natural, like I was objecting to some point in the book?" he said.

"I figured there would be a bunch of people in the audience who would be mouthing along, so we decided to quickly run through it," he added.

Darga, who teaches two sections of introductory acting, has performed in three Shakespeare productions. However, he had not seen, nor read *Hamlet* before reading for the part in December.

"After I found out I got the role, I made a point not to see anyone else do it, either," he said. "If you see somebody do a part like that, you have a tendency, even subconsciously, to copy that just a bit. I wanted this to be all my own."

Cityscape



He sat in the taxicab parked west of the Centrum and ate a butter-scotch ice cream bar.

At any time, the dispatcher might have ordered him to pick up a person wanting a ride. Or a shopper might have walked up and wanted a ride home from the Centrum. But on this day Dave Mattox would have a long wait before anyone wanted to ride in Yellow Cab No. 47.

"It varies," Mattox said of the number of riders he carries each day: sometimes as few as 15 riders climb into the back seat, sometimes as many as 30 people get in.

"Lincoln's not too good of a cab town," he said. "You can sit around for hours."

Between calls from the dispatcher and a few "pickups" — riders who walk up to a parked cab and ask for a ride — Mattox reads a newspaper and listens to a multi-band portable radio. He has been driving the cab — earning only a commission, no guaranteed wage — for about six months.

"Until something better comes along," he said, "it's a job — that's about it."

Then the dispatcher called and Mattox drove away to pick up another fare.

By D. Eric Kircher