



David Clasen/DN

Mathew Works, Pseudolus, struggles to tactfully explain to Carrie Moritz, Panacea, why she is not up to his standards during a rehearsal of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," opening Thursday at the Star City Dinner Theatre. Throughout the play Works, a slave, tries to con his way to freedom.

If you're tired of dinner then a movie on every date, an alternative may be to simply combine food and entertainment at the Star City Dinner Theatre.

Tonight, the theater kicks off its third season with "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum."

Chris Rook, the assistant manager of the dinner theater, said the show was about a slave named Pseudolus who wanted to be free.

"It's a musical comedy set in ancient Rome," she said.

Adrienne Walker, a trained opera singer and Star City Dinner Theatre actress, said the show was a great musical.

"Anybody's going to like it. It's hilarious and for all ages," she said.

The actors' names describe the characters perfectly, Walker said.

"My character's name is Domina because I am the dominant one, and there is also a Hysteria who is, of course, hysterical," she said.

Those who want to attend this performance can expect an intimate, cozy atmosphere, Rook said.

"It has a nice, casual setting," she said. "We want to make people feel comfortable."

Comfortable it is in a completely renovated, 100-year-old building.

"It's an intimate, small theater," Walker said. "Nobody would feel uncomfortable there. It's not intimidating at all."

Perhaps the theater is so intimate because unlike other theaters, the stage is very close - about two to three feet away from the tables.

Walker said another great aspect of the theater was that the dinner was completely done before the show started.

"That's nice because there's less noise, and there isn't anybody eating in front of viewers who came just for the show," she said.

For those wishing to attend the production tonight, or any show this year, tickets can be ordered in advance to insure entrance.

The cost for the show and dinner is \$25 or \$13 for just the show.

### Performance Preview

## A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum

**Where:** Star City Dinner Theater  
803 Q St.

**When:** September 7-10  
14-17, 21-24  
7:30 evenings  
2:30 Sunday

**Cost:** \$25 dinner & show  
\$15 just show

"It's a price that you can't beat for great food and great entertainment," Rook said.

Season tickets are \$170 for dinners and the shows or \$85 for just the shows. Most productions are shown Thursday through Saturday nights with Sunday matinees.

To put on the productions, the theater uses and needs local actors.

To get an audition, you just need to call.

Walker said if anyone was considering auditioning for a Star City production, they simply needed to call up the theater and set up a time for a 10 to 15 minute audition.

"They're probably doing auditions next week for upcoming shows," Walker said.

"We've used quite a few UNL students in our productions," Rook said.

Rook also said the theater would be collaborating with the University's music department for the musical, "Once Upon a Mattress."

Other major productions for the upcoming year include "My Fair Lady," "Guys and Dolls" and "It's a Wonderful Life."

For anyone interested in ordering tickets or auditioning for a part, contact the 24-hour box office at 477-8277, or stop at 8th and Q streets in the Haymarket.

# A CASUAL FORUM

Theater's cozy setting the perfect spot for dining and entertainment

BY JACKIE BLAIR

# Modern-day Hamlet takes Shakespeare to another level

BY SAMUEL MCKEON

The troubled prince of Denmark Corp. wears a knit cap around New York City, totes a video camera and practices his biggest speeches in his head.

And then he videotapes them. And then, they serve as motivation, the next best thing to the action he needs to revenge his father.

And we know well just how he will fail.

The newest version of "Hamlet," playing the next two weekends at the Mary Riepma Ross Theater, is a genuine adaptation of the material if there ever was one. It is a revelation, as director/writer Michael Almereyda took Shakespeare's most complex play and found its modern-day equivalent in the Big Apple.

Almereyda cast an actor who fit the role, Ethan Hawke. Hawke finally discovers a role that fits his nearly-incoherent mumbling.

Of the three most recent adaptations, Mel Gibson's version of "Hamlet" was the most entertaining, Kenneth Branagh's four-hour beast is faithful to the last word, and this version is the most vital, the finest interpretation of the material outside of its natural borders of castles, swords and medieval times.

While it's a slight remake of an earlier version entitled "Hamlet Goes to Business," a little-known Finnish film, "Hamlet" takes those ideas much further and, more importantly, spins the character of Hamlet in an entirely different direction.

Gone is the jocular, angry Danish prince of Gibson, and the preening, plotting persona of Branagh. In its place is Hawke, a film student with enough sadness for three tragedies, haunted by his own video incarnation.

There are two Hamlets, actually: the resident of Hawke's mind, spoken in voice overs and video clips, and Hawke himself, who actually speaks fewer lines than a few other characters.

Upon learning of his father's death, Hamlet returns just in time to see Claudius (Kyle MacLachlan) assume the reigns of Denmark Corp., a multimedia

MOVIE REVIEW

**Hamlet**

**Director:** Michael Almereyda

**Stars:** Ethan Hawke, Bill Murray & Diane Venora

**Rating:** R (violence, adult situations)

★ ★ ★ ★ of 4 stars

giant. At his side is Gerturde (Diane Venora), the hasty mother.

And the story drives from there, though not in the specific detail of the play. Almereyda also plays down certain passages, cuts others out and allows the climax to play on without much tension.

By no means is this "Hamlet,"

playing at the Dundee Theater in Omaha, a beginner's version of the tale. Anyone entirely unfamiliar with the play will find this film frustrating, and Hawke's performance hard to follow.

Almereyda expects a certain level of understanding from his audience, hoping they take more from the mood of the film than the play itself, which they ought to be familiar with.

And the atmosphere of this "Hamlet" reigns supreme; Almereyda injects the action with a dense fog of melancholy, using the title role as its physical manifestation.

Using a color palette not unlike Kubrick's in "Eyes Wide Shut," the photography captures NYC clarity, able to easily move from grandeur to squalor within one scene. Soothing and luxuriant like a depressant, Hamlet only rouses himself to anger on small occasions, preferring to play out large philosophies, including part of his "To be or not to be" speech, within his head.

The mood touches upon other characters. Polonius is played by Bill Murray, with the same sort of



Megan Cody/DN

whimsical cynicism that marked his performance in "Rushmore." Murray transforms his character into neither old fool nor wise sage, but a corporate Willy Loman, who might have once believed his words, but now uses them as philosophic filler.

Julia Stiles is Ophelia, who seems to have been made decidedly cloyish and immature in this version, to the point of pouts and wistful dreams of watery suicide. Stiles, who inhabits the role of a self-assured character quite well, seems too grounded and smoky-voiced to nail this wavering performance, though her breakdown scene in the Guggenheim Museum is memorable.

Liev Schriber, as Laertes, is appropriately angry when called upon, while Venora and MacLachlan form a strange, lustful pair. Sam Shepard, as the wronged father, affects an Irish accent nicely.

And then there is Hawke, whose act borders on the near comical in a few scenes, especially one where his obsession of film is adequately revealed at the video counter. And yet it is complex, for this Hamlet keeps much inside, venting often to various machinery, along with his pixel-vision camcorder.

Here, it is the technology that serves as Hamlet's shield of insecurity, as his play within a play becomes a montage of classic films, and he contemplates his fate against images of Brandon Lee and James Dean.

More than earlier versions, Hawke's performance unveils an unrealized promise in the Danish prince, a genius that hides just underneath the surface, and skulks the action aisles of Blockbuster Video.

Almereyda's "Hamlet" gives proper characterization for Hamlet's inability to complete the deed, along with an idea of being overmatched by Claudius, served up perfectly during a late scene in a laundromat.

It is these individual scenes, more like a play than it seems at first glance, that resonate afterward, beyond the implications of the tale. The movie is less about drawing modern parallels to the tale than it is about using modernity to better explain Hamlet's actions.

Assuming one knows and understands the play, it becomes clear that director Almereyda is making his claim with the picture, while still respecting Shakespeare's language, much unlike that of "William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet" of a few years prior.

Rather, the movie stretches the limits of the play's comprehension and inhabits an entirely different universe in the process to evoke its mood. Vibrant yet coolly haunting, audacious yet faithful, "Hamlet" hits the tragic vein of life perfectly, enough to confuse a seasoned Shakespeare vet, and yet still be witness to a stunning creation.