

"Celebrating 36 years of Theatre"

Provincetown Theatre
Company
presents

Featuring:

Nick Harris

Ryan
Hartman-Neal

John Haylor

Joanne A.
Manuli

Tanya Rubins

Sewall Whittemore

HATE HAMLET

A Comedy by PAUL RUDNICK
Directed by DENNIS A. DUNN

Sponsored by
The Provincetown Inn

THURSDAYS thru
SUNDAYS
August 12 thru 29

TICKETS \$14
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& Members
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8 PM



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♦ THEATER REVIEW ♦

“I Hate Hamlet” makes Shakespeare pleasurable

By Laura V. Scheel

How many of us remember struggling through Shakespeare's brilliance in some long-ago English class, encumbered and discouraged by the medieval verbiage? There's nothing like the live stage, complete with costumes, effective props, over-embellished accents and hand gestures to make the experience of the master genuine, and honestly comprehensible. The Provincetown Theatre Company's latest production, “I Hate Hamlet,” written by Paul Rudnick, is a combination of all the necessary elements: superb writing, overexaggerated acting (though deliberate at times) and dramatic hand gestures aplenty.

The production, directed by Dennis Dunn, has taken on the monumental task of Shakespearean translation, though with a slightly different twist. What we have seems to be all at once a comedic spoof on the smugness of Shakespearean theater while still defending the very noble art of performance. The conflict of art versus commercial prowess meanders along throughout the play, as does the question of true talent over celebrity appeal.

Loosely outlined, the main character of Andrew Rally, played by Ryan Hartman-Neal, is having a career crisis. A beloved television dra-

opportunity to prove himself as a “real” actor. The test is formidable — from soap star poster boy to the role of Hamlet on the live stage — and Rally is indeed daunted by the challenge. His life is a mess and it shows. Not only is he afraid of courting career mortification, but his girlfriend, Deirdre, continually denies him of his manhood. In just one of the many little gems of dialogue, Andrew drastically claims that his life is just like high school — “no sex and Shakespeare!”

As it happens, Rally's new apartment was once the lair of the deceased and infamous John Barrymore, perhaps the greatest actor to ever play the role of Hamlet. The opening scene finds Rally (immediately settled into his signature turmoil) surrounded by Deirdre, real estate agent Felicia Dantine and his agent, Lillian Troy. These orbiting characters appear at various times throughout the play, providing necessary relief from the intensity of Rally's perpetual agony.

The fast-talking, accent-heavy Felicia, played by Joanne Manuli, is a constant whirlwind of motion, careening around the stage in what works out to be a very likable and light contribution. She's funny and odd at just the right moments, especially during the seance in which she attempts to “cross over to the

will summon the spirit of John Barrymore on Rally's behalf. It turns out that the ghost of Barrymore has already been unknowingly summoned by Rally himself, in a desperate plea for advice and guidance.

Rally's aging agent, German-born Lillian Troy, played nicely by Sewall Whittemore, provides a welcome and less hysterical presence among the group. Later in the play, in some of its most endearing moments, Lillian comes face to face with the ghost of Barrymore in a scene of sensuous reminiscence. As a very young woman, Lillian spent an evening in the arms of the once virile Barrymore; what unfolds is the rare and truly sentimental and romantic scene in which the two are eager to re-create the past.

Tanya Rubins plays Rally's girlfriend, Deirdre, portraying the ultimate satire (we hope) of the wannabe actress who may have passion but, alas, no talent. Described by Rally as a “victim of a relentlessly happy childhood,” Deirdre's presence is an unconvincing (and shriekingly loud) motivation for Rally's quest for artistic greatness. As the devil on Rally's shoulder, Gary Peter Lefkowitz (John Haylor) is the stereotypical depiction of the mon-



Ryan Hartman-Neal (L) and Nick Harris from “I Hate Hamlet.”

er. Haylor is a delight, schmoozing his way through the endless temptations of fame and fortune promised to Rally if only he gives up this Shakespearean farce.

Without question, Nick Harris's portrayal of John Barrymore is the backbone of the entire play. Resplendent in black tights, Harris, as the suave and very confident Barrymore, is the true lifeline of the play. Without his strength and consistency, the play might be cast adrift in a sea of mediocrity. It seems that the cleverest lines are reserved for him, and his delivery could not be more natural and appropriate. Barrymore is a perfect balance for Rally, who tends to spin out of the realm of charm — a world that Barrymore never leaves.

The play gets much of its appeal from the quality of the writing itself. Paul Rudnick has created a storehouse of exceptional and memorable one-liners. The unusual relationship of Barrymore's ghost and Andrew Rally is very well-crafted, providing the solid foundation on which the play rests.

Though at times hampered by unnecessary overdramatization, “I Hate Hamlet” is more than enjoyable.

“I Hate Hamlet” runs Thursday through Sunday evenings at 8 p.m. through Aug. 29 (with a possible extension through Labor Day weekend) at the Provincetown Inn. Tickets are \$14 and are available at the door or through Provincetown Reservations Systems, 487-2400.

Provincetown Theatre Company
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Directed by Dennis A. Dunn

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