

Gangster "Hamlet" at the Hollywood Fringe

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Rachel Lynn Walker's adaptation of "Hamlet" at the Fringe for the Boundless Artists Theatre Company, sets the story in an age of [Italian mafia](#), reminiscent to the time of the Godfather. The production also uses the original lyrical aspects of [Shakespeare's](#) words to add music to the work and adds interesting dynamics to some of the character relationships by making some of the typically male characters female.

Overall the story of Hamlet in this production is the typical story of revenge and starts with the walking of the Ghost of Hamlet's father played by Ryan Jones. However instead of two male watchmen, the play starts with just Bernardo (Daniel Verdugo) seeing the ghost who brings Hamlet's friend Horatio (played by a woman, Shannon Walker, dressed in an outfit out of the film "His Girl Friday") to see the apparition walk the night. Hamlet, played by Evan Garcia, meets with the ghost of his father to find he was murdered and he must get revenge. Evan effectively portrays the tragic broken anti hero lost in the corruption of those around him.

Hamlet's living family looks and sounds like they should be living in Little Italy New York or Chicago. King Claudius (Richard Lozoya), Hamlet's mother Queen Gertrude (Lauren Santra) and his former love Ophelia (Cynthia Asmar) all resemble robust well fed Italians. Laertes played by Ernie Rivera realistically plays the protective and vengeful brother to the scorned and broken Ophelia. Unlike many other production, this one does not cut Ophelia's scenes.

In Shakespeare's tradition the death of Ophelia occurs off stage, but not her funeral. Sergio Venegas plays both her murdered father Polonius and the presiding priest. Venegas' voice seems to channel Joe Peschi, while his face and demeanor mirror the image of an Hispanic Santa's helper reflecting the love Polonius has for his daughter.

A familiar literary device of Shakespeare is the play within the play, and it's most famous example is the play of the murder of Gonzago performed by a group of players in Hamlet. However in Walker's rendition, Rosencrantz (Joy Ann-Marie Horn) and Guildenstern (Andrew Cercedes) play the murdering Player Queen and her victim King. The actors Horn and Cercedes act as a couple in putting a different spin on the relationship and dynamic that is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

One criticism of the production that is easily remedied. Horn sings her lines in the Gonzago revenge play and later when she takes on the role of a Grave digger. However during the Gonzago play there is music playing that is out of tune with the tune of the Player Queen, distracting from the performance, while during the grave digging scene Horn's singing voice exists on its own, making a much better scene. The play within the play seems more of a bad lounge act with the distracting mismatched music.

Another change made to the original Hamlet that is significant, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears not just in the opening act but also toward the end emphasizing perhaps the innocence's of Hamlet's mother in the foul murder of her husband and laying all guilt on the brother King.

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