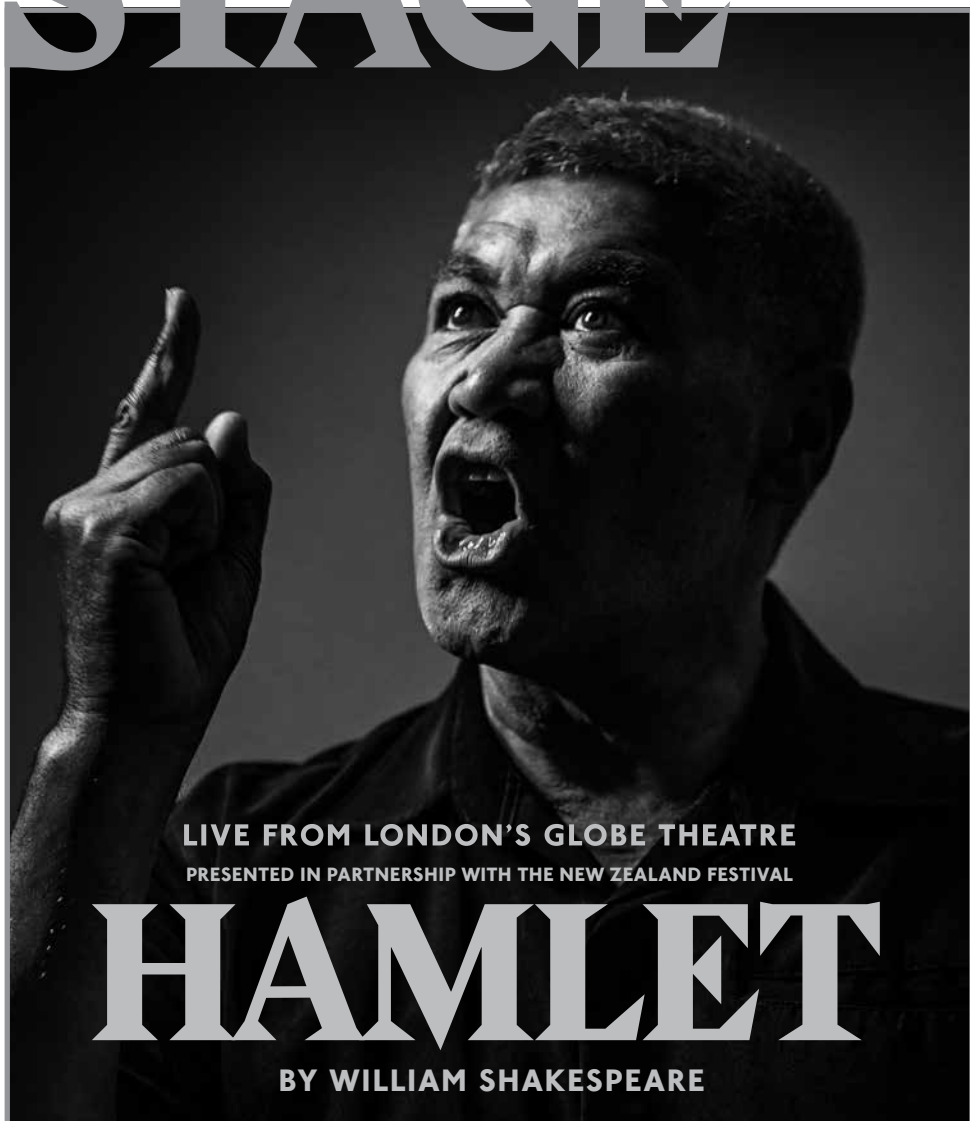


ON— STAGE

AUCKLAND
THEATRE
COMPANY

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LIVE FROM LONDON'S GLOBE THEATRE

PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NEW ZEALAND FESTIVAL

HAMLET

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET IS THE WORLD

Hamlet was the natural play to take on this worldwide journey, writes Heather Neill.

Hamlet is endlessly fascinating, and open to endless interpretation by directors and the actors who tackle the leading role – Shakespeare's longest. This play seems to encompass everything, to speak to every nation and every generation. It deals with love, grief, madness, revenge, friendship and death. It is humane, cruel, clever, funny, heart-breaking. It includes both philosophical contemplation and bloody action. It is both highly political and uncompromisingly personal, focusing on a turbulent state, a dysfunctional family (or two) and one extraordinary individual. Medieval Christianity and Renaissance Humanism are woven through the speeches, which include some of the most quoted lines in literature. According to the scholar Harold Bloom, Shakespeare more or less invented the notion of personality as we understand it, and *Hamlet* is a prime example.

If the world is in *Hamlet*, it is hardly surprising that it finds an honoured place world-wide. Or that Dominic Dromgoole, the Globe's artistic director, and Tom Bird, the producer of Globe to Globe, the 2012 festival of 37 plays by Shakespeare in 37 languages, have chosen this play for their two-year global tour. A multicultural company of 12 will resume some of the friendships made in 2012 and others established on two earlier European tours of

Hamlet. And in some places there will be a ready-made fan base: New Zealander Rawiri Paratene, who plays Polonius and Claudius, is popular at home and throughout the Pacific Islands. The directors, Dromgoole and Bill Buckhurst, and producer Bird are sure that *Hamlet* more than any other play has the power to maintain the interest of the company over their two years together. The actors will be sensitive to what may be wildly different responses wherever they go. There may be surprises: actor Paul Rhys, playing Hamlet in Tokyo in 2000, remembers looking up in the final scene to see rows of formally dressed Japanese women awash with tears at the death of Gertrude.

The company plans to visit every country in the world, big and small, from the United States and China to the tiny Pacific island of Nauru, which has fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. In that case, the Globe *Hamlet* will be a premiere – 400 years after it was written

Hamlet was, in fact, seen in some unexpected places quite soon after its first performances at the Globe in the early years of the 17th century as English actors toured extensively. There is evidence, believes Dromgoole, that local actors were recruited by travelling players to translate some of the story, while the visiting company boned up on a few jokes and sayings of

beguile their audience in their own language. Much the same is likely to happen on this tour in far-flung destinations where English is not spoken. Often, however, people in other countries feel they 'own' Shakespeare, especially *Hamlet*. In Armenia, the country's most famous footballer has the middle name Hamlet. And Simon Russell Beale, a National Theatre Hamlet, describes touring Eastern Europe: '...there was an extraordinary proprietorialness shown by a lot of people towards the play. Two of the arts ministers we met were former Hamlets and they took it very seriously.' He was recognised in a shoe shop in Belgrade: '... the woman serving said, "Hamlet, Hamlet, Hamlet". She had no English at all except "To be or not to be", which we said to each other 40 times.'

Perhaps Germany is the country which has most wholeheartedly adopted Shakespeare and identified itself particularly with *Hamlet*, of which there are at least 30 German translations. Throughout the 19th century intellectuals saw Germany as Hamlet himself: philosophical, thinking about politics rather than acting. In 1844, Ferdinand von Freiligrath's poem declared 'Hamlet ist Deutschland!' Again, in 1989, as the Berlin wall came down, the Deutsche Theater was rehearsing *Hamlet* for a seven-hour performance, to express the mood of the times. Its director and translator, Heiner Müller, described *Hamlet* as 'A play about a state crisis, about two eras and the rift between them. About an intellectual straddling the rift and not sure at all what to do. The old does not work any longer, the new is not to his taste.' The Globe tour will visit both the

Bremer Shakespeare Company (old friends of the Globe who performed Timon of Athens here in 2012) and Wittenberg, Hamlet's university city.

Hamlet can be the source of consolation or a means of expressing (more or less safely) criticism of a tyrannical government. Ronald Searle's *Hamlet Goes Hollywood* designs for a 1944 production in Changi jail in Singapore fall into the first category. On Robben Island a copy of Shakespeare's complete works was secretly passed between prisoners, three of whom chose *Hamlet* as their favourite. Last year in an account of this, *Hamlet's Dreams: The Robben Island Shakespeare*, David Schalkwyk meditated on the nature of liberty, drawing parallels between apartheid South Africa and Hamlet's isolation in Denmark.

In the Soviet Union, *Hamlet* was a favourite choice of theatre companies cunningly criticising the regime. It was said to be Stalin's most hated play. Lithuanian rock star Andrius Mamontovas, who played Hamlet, directed by the world-famous Eimuntas Nekrošius, in the Globe to Globe festival, says that theatre, especially *Hamlet*, was a means of expressing ideas about freedom. Actors and directors could send 'secret messages' to their audiences. Czech and Polish productions of the play proliferated in times of political unrest, while in China *Hamlet* was presented in the immediate aftermath of the protests in Tiananmen Square in 1990.

Hamlet, already a favourite in many countries, will, by 2016 be even more thoroughly established in the global consciousness.

Heather Neill is a freelance journalist and theatre writer (article extract).

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HAMLET

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

CREATIVE

Director – **DOMINIC DROMGOOLE & BILL BUCKHURST**

Designer – **JONATHAN FENSOM**

Composer / Musical Director – **BILL BARCLAY**

COMPANY

**KEITH BARTLETT, JOHN DOUGALL, LADI EMERUWA,
PHOEBE FILDES, MIRANDA FOSTER, NAEEM HAYAT,
BERUCE KHAN, THOMAS LAWRENCE,
JENNIFER LEONG, RAWIRI PARATENE,
MATTHEW ROMAIN AND AMANDA WILKIN.**

TOURING STAGE MANAGERS

**REBECCA AUSTIN, CARRIE ZENA BURNHAM,
DAVID MICHAEL McEVOY AND ADAM WILLIAM MOORE**

PRODUCTION

Lighting Operator – **RHED CLIFT**

Wardrobe Assistant – **PENELOPE PRATT**

Sound Engineer – **JONNY KEATING**

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY WOULD LIKE TO
THANK THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR HELP WITH
THIS PRODUCTION: The New Zealand Festival,
Dawn Sanders and The Shakespeare Globe Centre New Zealand,
Sky City Theatre staff, BounceNZ, CityLife Auckland - Heritage Hotel,
Jamie Blackburn, and Herewini Easton.

Auckland Theatre Company is supported by Principal Funders
Creative New Zealand and Auckland Council.

Hamlet opened on June 3rd at SKYCITY Theatre. *Hamlet* is
approximately 2 hours 45 minutes including interval. Please remember to
switch off all mobile phones, pagers and watch alarms.

