

Shakespeare With an Italian Twist

Natasha Lardera (February 26, 2016)



During the month of March two of Shakespeare's most famous plays, Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet, are being revisited in New York's theaters with an Italian twist.

From March 4th to the 20th, at Teatro Circolo (64 East 4th St) First Maria LLC is presenting [Hamlet](#) [2], directed by [Celeste Moratti](#) [3] and performed, entirely in English, by a mixed American-Italian company. [Verona Walls](#) [4], directed by [DeLisa M. White](#) [5] and performed at [The Workshop Theater](#) [6] (312 West 36th Str) from March 3rd to 26th, centers on the loves and mistakes of Mercutio, [Romeo](#) [7]'s best friend, as the action of Romeo and Juliet plays out somewhere offstage.

The "twist" is that this production, which was originally produced by Milan's [Teatro Franco Parenti](#) [8] in September, 2013 as the final production in the theater's Hamlet Marathon which featured Hamlets from around the world, cut politics out of the plot to focus more on each character's role as either a child or a parent, "highlighting mistakes of mothers and fathers and the conflicts in children between filial duty and the emergence of conscience."

"I gave myself Gertrude to play, initially thinking the character was a selfish woman," Moratti, who is a new mother has said, "Then I re-read the play and now I sympathize with her. She's a protective



mother. She married Claudius out of her need for safety when her husband died. She thought the best way to keep herself and her son in the palace was to marry Claudius. She doesn't see her mistake."

Moratti's production of Hamlet, which includes a five-person greek-style chorus and live music by two Italian musicians, is set in the late '70s to early '80s, during the wave of hedonism that abruptly ended with the AIDS epidemic. That's meant to frame the play in an awakening of conscience for all characters, but especially in the character of Hamlet, played by Alexander Sovronsky. The Shakesperian tragedy is meant to be seen as a coming-of-age tale for a sheltered child who in a critical instance receives from his father an impossible order.

Moratti, who is an Italian-born actress internationally known for both realistic and surrealistic leading roles in the "Pathological Theater" productions of Dario D'Ambrosi, also explained that she "identifies with Hamlet, especially that side of the story about a child not cut out to be king, whose tough-minded father actually had given up on him, only to recall him from the grave, demanding to 'be like me—avenge my death.'" She also noted that Hamlet's penchant for theatrics is very Italian."

The actors performing in Hamlet are Alexander Sovronky as Hamlet, Celeste Moratti as Gertrude, Michael S. Kaplan as Polonius, J.B. Alexander as Claudius, Doria Bramante as Ophelia, Tristan Colton as Laertes, Nina Ashe as Rosencrantz/ Marcella/ Player Queen, Ross Hamman as Guildenstern/Barnardo/Player King/Gravedigger and Collin Mcconnell as Horatio. Additional chorus work is by Markus Weinfurter while live music will be performed by [Francesco Santalucia](#) [9] and Papaceccio. Their music will create an additional rhythm for the language thus aiding the narrative.

We now move to Verona, the beautiful town that was used as a backdrop of three of Shakespeare's plays: Romeo and Juliet, The Two Gentlemen of Verona and The Taming of the Shrew. In Verona Walls, New York based playwright [Laura Hirschberg](#) [10], a [Shakespeare](#) [11] devotee since childhood, imagines a background story for Romeo and Juliet that is separate from the ancient grudges that characterize the famous tragedy. The play, directed by DeLisa M. White and performed at The Workshop Theater (312 West 36th Str) from March 3rd to 26th, centers on the loves and mistakes of Mercutio, Romeo's best friend, as the action of Romeo and Juliet plays out somewhere offstage.

Shakespeare's fascination with Italy is a constant in his work. His Italian settings, which include Rome, Venice, Messina, Mantua and Padua in addition to Verona, are so crucial to his plays that they have become characters themselves.

"Verona Walls is a story of real love and powerful friendship in Shakespeare's star-crossed city. Following a string of bad dates, Mercutio is through with love and content to drink, fight, and party alongside his best friends, Romeo and Benvolio. That is, until he crosses paths with Alyssa, an intriguing woman who happens to be passing through Verona on her way to further adventures."

Their romance, is complete with misunderstandings, perfect happiness, and devastating heartbreak. "Ultimately, the story of whether you are lover or a fighter--and what love means to you--can't be learned from history. The subject of this story is perennial and recurrent," director DeLisa White has said of the play.

In the production's concept, indicators of period language and clothing are meant to drive home the extent to which the play's themes resonate through time. The set is rooted in Veronese architecture, but layered with street art and graffiti; costuming mixes the Elizabethan and the modern; classical verse mixes with Star Wars references and Auden poetry; music ranges from The Beatles to Cheap Trick to Gershwin to Bowie.

The actors are Ryan McCurdy (Mercutio), Rachel Flynn (Alyssa), Lauren Riddle, Jacob Owen, Christine Verleny, Mick Bleyer, Ben Sumrall, Liz Wasser and Matt Russell.

Hamlet

March 4 to 20, 2016



Teatro Circolo, 64 East 4th Street

Verona Walls

March 3 to 26, 2016

The Workshop Theater, 312 West 36th Street, 4th Floor

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