



Audio Description Notes for *Hamlet*

WELCOME

Welcome to the Guthrie Theater's production of *Hamlet*. My name is Elana Centor, and I will be your audio describer for this performance, which is approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes, including one 20-minute intermission.

This pre-show description covers the set and costumes, and because it's Shakespeare, we'll also review the relationships characters have with each other. This production contains mature content and themes, loud noises, strobe lights, haze and fog.

This is the fifth time the Guthrie has presented *Hamlet*. No other play holds the same historical and sentimental significance for the theater. It's not just that there have been five productions of *Hamlet* over the Guthrie's 60 years of existence — what is significant is that *Hamlet* was the first play ever performed at the Guthrie. The year was 1963 and it starred Broadway greats Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn. In 2006, *Hamlet* was the final production at the Guthrie's former location on Vineland Place before moving into this building.

Perhaps the most well-known of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* is considered by many to be the best play ever written. The reason? According to experts, "while the play showcases the struggles of Danish royals, what Shakespeare has really written about are the core elements that drive all of us: grief, betrayal, love (or the lack thereof) and family."

Hamlet is also Shakespeare's longest play. The original version ran four hours without an intermission. The Guthrie's version slices a little more than an hour off the original version and includes a 20-minute intermission.

In interpreting and making necessary cuts to fit the shorter run time, astute Shakespeare fans will notice that Joseph Haj — the Guthrie's Artistic Director and the Director of this play — made a daring change by moving the scene when Hamlet makes his "to be or not to be speech." The order of other scenes has been adjusted as well.

STAGING

The play takes place in Denmark at a castle in Elsinore. The set was inspired by Brutalist architecture, which is characterized by minimalist constructions that showcase the bare building materials and structural elements over decorative design.

On the *Hamlet* stage this translates into a set that is jagged and firm. With the exception of a sweeping staircase leading up the balcony, there are no soft edges on this set.

The set consists of a massive wall of beige stucco like corrugated material. A spiral staircase is on the left side that leads to a balcony that runs the width of the stage. It has an open railing.



STAGING (continued)

There is two-story opening in the middle of the set. The upper part of the opening serves as the major doorway for the balcony and the lower opening is a key entrance point to the stage.

A significant portion of the play is performed on the primary balcony. On the far right side of the stage, there is a crow's nest balcony high above the set that serves as the invading ship in the latter part of the play.

At the far right back of the stage tucked underneath the balcony sits Composer/Musician Jack Herrick surrounded by percussion instruments, a keyboard and an assortment of other musical instruments — he's a one-man band.

On the left side of the of the stage tucked behind the staircase is another open door. Because of the design of the thrust stage, this entrance may be difficult for some patrons to see. It is used sparingly.

The stage floor looks like a white stone. There are three levels of wide steps that surround the entire set. Actors use the steps to enter and exit the stage as well as use them as places to sit.

The stage's trap door is used in two scenes. The first is to bring in Gertrude sitting at her bedroom vanity writing letters. In this scene, as the vanity set is rising, an arras, also known as a tapestry, drops from the ceiling. It is behind the arras that Polonius hides when Hamlet enters his mother's bedroom. The trap door is also used as an open grave with grave diggers standing in the space and then sitting on the edge as they take a break.

Another key element of the staging is the lighting. While the lighting is an essential part of the storytelling throughout the play and captures the mood of each scene, nowhere is the lighting more impressive than when the actors are watching the play within the play, *The Mousetrap*. In this scene, the actors are seated onstage facing the audience as if they are watching the play at the back of the theater. All the action of *The Mousetrap* is conveyed through an animated black-and-white projection that flows across the stage and up against the massive structure. The projection is constantly moving throughout the scene.

COSTUMES

Hamlet is dressed in black in modern-day outfits. His black pants are cargo style with bold silver zippers at the pockets. He has black ankle boots and a crew neck long sleeve top. For outdoor scenes, he also as a black jacket and a black knit skull cap.

Queen Gertrude has an enormous wardrobe and multiple wigs. In total, she wears seven costumes and two coats. When designing these outfits, Costume Designer Trevor Bowen wanted to show how Queen Gertrude and King Claudius love fashion and use their wealth to be well dressed.



COSTUMES (continued)

Gertrude's wigs are as fabulous as the outfits. In the opening scene where she makes her first impression, she wears a wig that is styled twisted corn rows on each side that lead up to a faux hawk of braided poofs and knots. The entire hairstyle is embellished with gold cuff rings.

Like Gertrude, King Claudius has a multitude of costumes ranging from royal attire to a suit that resembles the outfit of a drum major in a band.

For the rest of the cast, the costume styles are mixed from modern-day casual to more formal wear for the royal court. The courtiers all wear sashes. The rest of the cast's outfits, like Hamlet, reflect modern clothing, including leather jackets and commando caps. Ophelia wears ankle-length floral dresses.

PROPS

A Lucite podium: Early in the play, Claudius makes a speech, and with the Lucite podium it has the feel of a modern-day press conference. Afterward there is a photo opportunity, and the buzzing of paparazzi's cameras go off as the king poses for the photographer.

White cushion and tuffets: Used during *The Mousetrap* scene, the cushion and tuffets are used for seating during the play.

Skulls: Several skulls are pulled from the open grave by the gravediggers.

CAST AND CHARACTERS

This is a large cast. As in many Shakespearean plays, several actors play multiple roles.

Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude, the nephew/stepson of King Claudius and the son of Old Hamlet, who recently died and appears in the play as a Ghost. Hamlet is played by **Michael Braugher**. This is his debut at the Guthrie. He has a shaved head and light brown skin.

Claudius is the new King of Denmark. He is married to Gertrude, Hamlet's mother and the former wife of his brother, Old Hamlet. Claudius is played by **John Catron**. He has white skin. Since 2010, he has performed in over 25 productions at the Guthrie. In addition to Claudius, he plays **Lucianus**, a character in *The Mousetrap*.

Gertrude is the wife of the King of Denmark, Claudius, the former wife of the previous king, Old Hamlet and the mother of Hamlet. She is played by **Regina Marie Williams**. A veteran of Guthrie productions, she was last seen in the 2022 production of *The Tempest*. Williams has brown skin and a shaved head when she is not wearing a wig.



CAST AND CHARACTERS (continued)

Polonius is Claudius's lawyer. He is a widow with two children, Ophelia and Laertes. In the play, he walks with a cane. He is tall and thin with white skin. Polonius is played by **Ray Dooley**. Dooley also plays a **Gravedigger**. This is his Guthrie debut.

Laertes is the son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia. He has returned to Denmark to attend the king's coronation. He had been studying in France at the university. He is medium height with white skin. Laertes is played by **Grayson DeJesus**, who was last seen at the Guthrie in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Ophelia is the daughter of Polonius, sister to Laertes and Hamlet's lover. Ophelia is portrayed by **Anya Whelan-Smith**. This is her Guthrie debut. She is of average height and build and has white skin.

Horatio is Hamlet's best friend, and he is played by **Daniel Petzold**. This is his second production at the Guthrie. Earlier this season, he was in the world premiere of *Sally & Tom*. He is thin with white skin.

Rosencrantz and **Guildenstern** are Hamlet's childhood friends. Claudius hires them to spy on Hamlet. The two friends are dressed in clothing reminiscent of golf attire, with one in a plaid sports blazer and the other in matching plaid pants. Their appearance suggests conformity and obedience to the established order. Rosencrantz is played by **William Sturdivant**. He has performed in multiple Guthrie productions. Sturdivant also portrays **Marcellus**, one of the guards at Elsinore. Guildenstern is portrayed by **Dustin Bronson**, who also plays **Fortinbras** and **Barnardo**.

Voltemand is a courtier at Claudius's court. In the play, he has just returned to the kingdom after an assignment to ask the King of Norway to put a stop to his son's plans to attack Denmark. He is played by **James Rodríguez** who also plays **Francisco, Priest** and the **Prologue** speaker in *The Mousetrap*. This is his Guthrie debut. He is of average height and has white skin.

Osric is a member of the court. He is superficial, shallow, forward and insincere. He is portrayed by **Max Wojtanowicz**. He has appeared in several Guthrie productions. In this version of *Hamlet*, he provides comic relief, primarily through his facial expressions.

The **Ghost** (Old Hamlet) casts an omnipotent presence. He is dressed in military formal wear of a past era — not Shakespearean clothing but not modern-day military. His outfit is navy blue complete with a cap and floor-length dress coat, and he wears aviator sunglasses. He is played by **David Whalen** who was last seen at the Guthrie in *King Lear*. In addition to the Ghost, he is one of the **Gravediggers** and the **Player King** in *The Mousetrap*.



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CAST AND CHARACTERS (continued)

Fortinbras is a Norwegian soldier. He delivers the last line in the play and is played by **Dustin Bronson**. Bronson also portrays **Guildenstern** and **Barnardo**. He is returning to the Guthrie and has been part of several productions.