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'I Hate Hamlet'

MPC's latest comedic offering plays on the tug of war between stage and screen, east and west

By KATHRYN PETRUCCELLI

Herald Correspondent

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Blame it on Neil Simon. One little play and Peter DeBono was pegged. The calls went out: 25-year-old, male; comedy. That was his ticket to ride.

Problem was, the ticket had been punched way too full of holes. Finally, a subagent saw him in a workshop — a dramatic role. Hey, the kid can do more than comedy!

"And I sort of broke out of the stereotype and started having more opportunities to work," said DeBono, now, many years later, the co-chairman of **Monterey** Peninsula College's drama department and director of "I **Hate Hamlet**" gracing the Morgan Stock Stage this weekend and next.

Andrew Rally (Greg Falge) also finds himself dueling dichotomies in the life of an actor — as well as the ghost of John Barrymore (Jeffrey T. Heyer) on a winding staircase — in Paul Rudnick's 1991 farce.

A television actor whose series just got canned, Rally leaves L.A. and tries his hand in New York, "**Hamlet**" in Central Park to be exact.

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From left: Greg Falge, Taylor Thorngate and Jeffrey T... (SKY A. RAPPOPORT/Special to The Herald)

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His aim? "To prove to himself that he's a real actor," said DeBono, "tackle something with some meat to it. A then he gets there and the panic sets in."

Rally's mixed blessings include a glamorous, yet chaste, girlfriend, Deirdre (Taylor Thorngate), a glamorous agent, Lilian (Nancy Kocher), friend and producer, Gary (Bob Colter) dangling a million-dollar contract for Hollywood, and the real estate agent, Felicia (Carol Daly), who has set him up in a brownstone apartment th once belonged to none other than

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actor John Barrymore.

Barrymore became famous for his portrayal: **Hamlet** in the 1920s, in the space between World Wars, which shed Victorian virtues : imbued characters with depth and real live sexuality. He is credited for subsequent re interpretations of Shakespeare.

Who better, then, to mentor Rally toward h Shakespearean aspirations? The ghost of Barrymore was just a séance away and m than willing to help out the young thespian

"On the surface it's kind of a very funny gh story, but what I found is that the writing is deeper than that. Each of these characters: trying to do something with their life, includ Barrymore," said DeBono.

Of course, solid, multifaceted writing does preclude a descent into pure farce when appropriate.

Almost ironically, Heyer who can be seen regularly on various stages around the Peninsula and DeBono, w has been part of the chairmanship at MPC since 1982, have never worked together directly before, somethir DeBono is happy to see change. "(Heyer's) got the approach right on in terms of what we're trying to do."

The last time the director worked with Falge was in the serious role of Tom from "The Glass Menagerie."

"This is 180 degrees. It's fun to see an actor put feet in both worlds," said DeBono.

He should know, after having to break out of the stamp of "light comedic" early in his career.

"There is stereotyping," DeBono stated. There is also the "east coast, west coast kind of thing."

Think of New York theater and L.A. theater as dark brothers, brooding over old and imagined wounds.

Heading west, says DeBono, actors bring the culture of Broadway to face off against the the glitzy retakes o Hollywood.

"They can be a multi-Tony Award-winning actor. The first thing they ask them (in L.A.) is 'What have you dor

After an actor lists his or her high honors and accolades of the stage, he says, the L.A. team stares back, th pupils little glowing screens, "And they go, 'Uh-huh.'"

In "I **Hate Hamlet**," Rally travels instead from west to east and must face fears of the live stage and an 8,000 role. Thankfully, the ghost of Barrymore is at his service.

Where there are ghosts there are special effects. MPC's tech department has had a good time with the play, reports DeBono.

Likewise, where there are toasted, ego-laden ghosts in Shakespearean garb, there are sword fights. Mark Schuler is responsible for the fight choreography.

What more could one ask for in entertainment?

"Mostly, people want to see musicals," said DeBono. "It's becoming harder and harder to get people to think feel something when they come to the theater. After a hard day at work, they want to laugh or hum along with song, and that's OK, but it limits you. That's why I like this, it's sort of both."

Musicals aside, eventually, you too must face the choice of stage or screen. Word is Netflix has no late fees.

Kathryn Petruccelli can be reached at montereybound@yahoo.com. GO!

THEATER OPENING ·What: MPC Theatre Company presents Paul Rudnick's "I Hate Hamlet" ·Where: Mor Stock Stage, **Monterey** Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., **Monterey** ·When: Preview at 7 p.m. Thursday, 18 opens at 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 19; continues at 7 p.m. Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays through Oct. 28 ·Tickets: \$18 in advance, \$25 at the door, seniors \$20, young adults (20 and under) \$15, children under 12 \$10, available by calling 646-4213 3-7 p.m. Wednesday-Friday or online at www.ticketguys.com ·Information: 646-4213 or www.mpctheatreco.com

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