

Get thee to MPC's rollicking production of 'I Hate Hamlet'

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There is something very special about having a ghost as one of the main characters in a play, especially when the author has a galloping and clever sense of humor and the ghost is one of the greatest Shakespearean actors of the 20th century, John Barrymore.

This is what you encounter in the MPC Theatre Company's rollicking production of "I Hate Hamlet," Paul Rudnick's madcap take on the dangers, pitfalls and perils of the legitimate theater.

The author's imagination was in high gear when he constructed an improbable but highly entertaining play about a young, successful television star whose show has been cancelled is then offered the role of Hamlet in "Shakespeare in the Park" in New York.

He accepts the offer, even though he says he hates Hamlet because he once had disappointed aspirations as a serious actor.

He is also panic stricken at the idea of playing one of the weightiest roles ever conceived. He tries to back out but cannot.

But having coincidentally rented an apartment

where John Barrymore once lived and being involved in a seance to evoke his spirit, of course, there arrives that wonderfully supernatural being whose mission is to make a real actor out of the TV figure and, in the course of which, the audience receives a demonstration of the art of acting from the sublime to the ridiculous.

As Andrew, the sadly insecure, inadequate-feeling, would-be Hamlet, Greg Falge is highly believable.

He very ably expresses his lack of self-confidence, even while skewering his TV success.

He is unhappily in love and sexually frustrated and, in general, as he grows and matures under the tutelage of his ghostly mentor, he truly becomes a "real" actor.

When the ghost takes over, and Jeffrey T. Heyer does so in a wonderfully masterful fashion, the action is nonstop hilarious.

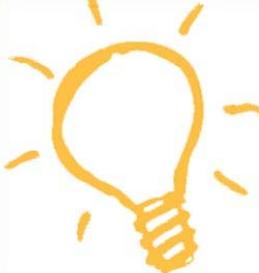
Heyer, in full black Hamlet costume, cuts a dashing romantic figure. He has the swagger and flair of a somewhat overstated, but spellbinding, matinee idol, and his diction is perfect in the scene in which Hamlet instructs the players.

His moments of serious reflection and a tender love scene with an old flame are finely drawn.

There is the requisite foil, a Hollywood TV writer-producer-director who comes to offer Andrew a highly lucrative new series. Robert Colter, in a terrific cameo performance, tears the role to tatters with his electrically charged and frenetic salesmanship.

He is the perfect example of lowbrow, crass commercialism and is sidesplitting as he spouts some of the funniest, down-to-earth lines in the

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show.

As Andrew's chaste and flighty girlfriend, Taylor Thorngate is out of this world mentally, but very much present physically as she perversely flaunts her highflown ideas about love, art and sex.

Her reactions to her dreamlike encounter with the ghost are very nicely demonstrated, but they raise an unanswered question about sexual contact with the beyond.

Nancy Kocher as Lillian, Andrew's agent, creates wistful, tender moments when she encounters the ghost with whom she had a long-gone romantic encounter.

She made this into a memorable segment of the show and it was a fine contrast to her earlier business-like hardboiled statements.

Carol Daly as Felicia, the real estate agent who starts the show by renting Barrymore's apartment to Andrew, is fast-talking, fast-acting and gleefully establishes the mood of the antics to follow very ably.

Director Peter De Bono guided his virtuoso cast to express and define their characters with verve and great individual depth.

The script is laden with wise-cracking humor, but, even so, the actors seemed like real people as they played to each other with skill and polish.

De Bono also brought out the thoughtful moments of the plot. There is a moving scene in which Barrymore discusses how he deteriorated when he left the stage to go to Hollywood and there is also a serious discussion of the art of bringing a drama to life.

Scenic designer Nicole Bryant Stephens created an impressively grand and handsome gothic two-story set with a baronial atmosphere. The special furnishings and details added greatly to the atmosphere of the play.

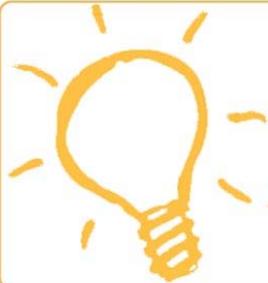
Costume designer Constance Gamiere created lavish outfits for the characters and Mark Shuler's duel choreography was fun to watch and skillfully carried out by the two Hamlets.

Yes, ghosts have their place in drama, and in this one, the ghost sparked a very enjoyable evening of light-hearted theatrical entertainment.

Nathalie Plotkin can be reached at nanoplotkin@redshift.com . GO!

THEATER REVIEW ·What: MPC Theatre Company presents Paul Rudnick's "I Hate Hamlet" ·Where: Morgan Stock Stage, Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., Monterey ·When: 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 from 3-7 p.m. Wednesday-Friday or online at www.ticketguys.com ·Information: 646-4213 or www.mpctheatreco.com

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