

[AXS ENTERTAINMENT](#) / [ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT](#) / [PERFORMING ARTS](#)

# A mad bad and dangerous "Hamlet"

April 14, 2016

5:43 PM MST

[View all  
5 photos](#)

Rex Ryan as Hamlet  
*AC Production*

## Hamlet by William Shakespeare directed by Peter Reid and produced by AC Productions in association with The New Theatre

Rating: ★★★★★

2016 not only marks the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, it also marks the 400th anniversary of the death of a reasonably well known playwright from Stratford upon Avon. To honour the great bard the New Theatre have included what many consider to be his greatest work, 'Hamlet' in their programming for 2016. AC Production's 'Hamlet,' adapted and directed by Peter Reid, makes no bones about the significant cuts, edits and restructuring it makes to Shakespeare's original text. Referencing Morecambe and Wise's classic sketch with Andre Previn, Reid describes his version as one which has 'all the right words, but not necessarily in the right order.' Bold, brave and bordering on brilliant on occasion, Reid's adaptation of 'Hamlet' is to be commended for being willing to try out new things. But if at times it hits the mark, it often doesn't go far enough and

doesn't always succeed as well as it might have.

Like the uncertainty at the heart of its central character, AC Production's 'Hamlet' defines itself more by what it's not than by what it actually is. It's not for purists, not the full text, not the original structure and does not include a number of original, secondary characters. All perfectly clear. What's not so clear is the central unity that gives cohesion to the whole. Indeed, at times, it feels like a series of episodic scenes loosely bound together. This is partially a result of the extensive cuts undertaken to reduce the running time from four hours to just over two, and to accommodate adapting the large scale work to the intimacy of a black box space. While Reid honours the twin goals of clarity and understanding incredibly well, thereby making his 'Hamlet' extremely accessible, something vital gets lost in translation, emerging at occasion to thrilling effect only to disappear, making its absence strongly felt. The result is something inconsistent, something mesmerising at times but, at others, something whose shortened length doesn't really feel shorter or compensate for the claustrophobic sense of playing this great reckoning in a little room, even if that room is one of the best black box spaces in Dublin.

Technically it's a mixed bag. Set design is minimal, a few chairs, some curtains and a large box, none of which supply either information or impact. Props are more successful, particularly the skulls, and costumes by Alex Cusack are also credible, hinting at a nameless, timeless royalty in places. Lighting design by Cathy O'Carroll is most successful, with O'Carroll sacrificing scale for depth, creating atmosphere and texture, understanding the demands and limits of both text and the space and exploiting both to the full.

Against this an able cast show moments of brilliance, and others where they perhaps doth protest too much. Rex Ryan's 'Hamlet' is mad, bad and dangerous to know and Ryan exploits both Hamlet's charm and humour to great effect. Throughout, Ryan renegotiates the terms of his character and on several occasions hits a rich vein, with his first meeting with Ophelia being particularly memorable. Sometimes his Hamlet topples from the mad into the maniacal and sometimes, like the majority of the cast, he struggles with the confines of the space, channelling a lot more energy than he seems to know what to do with. At others he strikes the perfect balance. Shane O'Regan's Laertes suffers the same fate, appearing histrionic rather than vengeful upon hearing of his father's death, yet bringing a wonderful warmth to his big brother scene with the young Ophelia. Grace Fitzgerald's reinterpreted Ophelia is no fading violet, and if Ophelia's descent into madness stutters in places, when she final arrives, Fitzgerald's haunting singing is incredibly effective, even if the voodoo skull mask is a little too obvious and cheap a gimmick. Killian Coyle's loyal Horatio was loving realised, as was Daniel Costello's proud, parasitic, patriarch Polonius. Paul Kealyn's devious Claudius went from strength to strength, with Kathleen Warner Yates being a tower of strength as the conflicted Gertrude. Ethan Dillon and Finbarr Doyle as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with more than a nod to Tom Stoppard, as well as playing the gravediggers, brought a wonderful vitality and comedy to proceedings in a dark production that never lost its sense of humour.

Reid's reimagining of the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia is one of this productions genuine delights, wonderfully realised by Ryan and Fitzgerald. It left you wanting more. As did the

hurried death behind the arras, but for different reasons, and not the good ones. His willingness to go new places, try new things are what was most successful about this production of 'Hamlet' and Reid is to be commended for taking the risk. For when 'Hamlet' goes somewhere really new, as in a beautiful moment shared by Kathleen Warner Yates' Gertrude and Grace Fitzgerald's doomed, singing Ophelia, it opens up rich layers and interpretative possibilities. But it just didn't go there enough. In the end 'Hamlet is maddeningly good in places, it's just too bad it loses its way in others, for at times it comes dangerously close to being something quite special.

'Hamlet' by William Shakespeare, directed by Peter Reid and produced by AC Productions in association with The New Theatre runs at The New Theatre until April 23rd

Show begin 7.30 p.m.

For further information, visit The New

Theatre [http://www.thenewtheatre.com/tnt\\_php/scripts/page/home.php](http://www.thenewtheatre.com/tnt_php/scripts/page/home.php)



**Chris O'Rourke**  
Theatre Examiner