

Black Swan Events presents

HAMLET

in the CEMETERY

starring

Justin Scalise

directed by

Andrew Matthews

October 21st - November 6th, 2010

Thursday - Saturday @ 7:30 PM

Boggy Creek Cemetery · 7409 Circle S Rd.

512 · 474 · 8497 www.AusTix.com

sponsored by the Greater Austin Creative Alliance

THE GREATER AUSTIN
CREATIVE
ALLIANCE

Black Swan Events - high impact, hard to predict, and rare events that are beyond the realm of normal expectations - a term popularized by epistemologist, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, in his best-selling book, *The Black Swan*.

From the Producer

Hamlet is considered the greatest drama in the English language, and was hailed as the poem of the millennium. In this country it is produced frequently, perhaps every other year in any given major city. But even for a play as great as *Hamlet*, with such timeless, universal questions and ideas, I feel the need to ask, why do we want to tell this story, at this time, in this particular place? Aside from my great desire to produce it, and play the title role, I was finally driven by the idea of telling this story in a cemetery. Where better to enact this drama of mortality and ruminations on the after-life, than in a cemetery? And when I discovered the difficulty that Austin's cemeteries are currently facing of a lack of funding for upkeep and repair, I knew the time was right. In addition to being the places where our loved ones are laid to rest, these cemeteries represent our community's history and heritage. I am grateful to have found a way to contribute to the preservation of that heritage. A portion of the proceeds from this production will benefit Boggy Creek Cemetery. Growing out of this inaugural project, part of the mission for Black Swan Events will always be to find some way to benefit the community in our endeavors to produce great art and entertainment. I am forever indebted to Andrew Matthews, for his direction and many efforts far beyond the call of duty, to an amazing company of actors, crew and artistic staff for their talent and commitment, and to the Onion Creek Masonic Lodge, owners of this beautiful cemetery, especially to Dale Flatt for all of his enthusiasm, encouragement and endless help and guidance. And last, but never least, you, our audience, along with all of the souls at rest in Boggy Creek Cemetery, I hope you all enjoy our show! Thank you.

- Justin Scalise

Director's Note

Has any other work of drama influenced western culture as much as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? Besides being Shakespeare's most produced play (four productions of *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Austin this year notwithstanding), *Hamlet* is far and away the most written about piece of fiction, inspiring thousands of books and articles of analysis that attempt to "pluck out the heart of [its] mystery," many of which ironically adding to the library of *Hamlet* criticism if only to ask "Why is there so much *Hamlet* criticism?" It is a valid question. It has been called Shakespeare's most brilliant, most poetic work, his most modern play that simultaneously reflected and advanced Renaissance thinking; but also his most puzzling play, most ambiguous and flawed. Certainly, trying to unravel the warped chronology and blunt contradictions has been a daunting, perhaps futile task. (And unnecessary: it is a testament to Shakespeare's brilliance as a dramatist that inconsistencies which seem glaring in textual study float by the audience with nary a ripple). And the myriad ambiguities of plot and character have required plenty of study and soul-searching from the actors and director, and the patience to accept ambiguity in drama, as we must in life.

However, despite the wealth of intellectual and historical analysis, what has given *Hamlet* its longevity (like so many of Shakespeare's plays) is its inherent drama. Shakespeare took the template of the familiar revenge play and turned it into the tragedy of two families whose stories intersect in the worst way possible, filled with scenes of such high emotion and circumstance that they can hardly fail to affect an audience. Ghosts, murder, betrayal, revenge, madness, fools and clowns, funerals and sword fights. These are the elements that make staging *Hamlet* seem effortless. Shakespeare seems to do so much of the work for you, even to the point of defining good acting in the words of his young protagonist: "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up the nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." In this short conversation between the Prince and his players, the world's greatest dramatist gives us a succinct, artful treatise on the function and qualities of good theatre. Though it is a high bar and a heavy burden that Shakespeare gives his actors, we take it on, like so many others before us, wondering if he could have ever guessed how many years those words would admonish and encourage actors and directors around the world.

- Andrew Matthews

Dramaturgical Note

"Thus conscience does make cowards of us all"... "So full of artless jealousy is guilt, it spills itself in fearing to be spilt"... "Whether tis nobler in the mind"... In this timeless work we see the mirror held up to conscience, guilt, and the struggle with right and wrong through not only Hamlet, but all of the main characters. Each responds to Hamlet's manic state (laid over at times with his "antic disposition") through the lens of their own guilt: Ophelia thinks of it in terms of their crumbling relationship; Gertrude, in terms of her "o'erhasty marriage"; Polonius, in terms of his mistakes as a father; and Claudius (rightly) thinks Hamlet is somehow onto him. Each in their own way tries to do what is right (even Claudius tries to pray, though that remedy remains out of his reach). And Hamlet struggles mightily with the question: to be or not to be. To act or be nothing. To act even if it means the end of you, even if to finish this hero's quest is certain death. Not suicide, but a suicide mission.

But in this time of the Renaissance emerging, new heroes of philosophy are replacing those of brute force. Under the new hero's rules, one must simply "bear the whips and scorns of time" with reason but no recompense, surely that is not noble, he wonders? His reason, newly fine-tuned in Wittenberg, continues to struggle with how a hero should be, "what is nobler in the mind", even as he stalls for time with his "antic disposition" and lines up confirmation to ease his conscience. But his passion, when released, also alienates him from the two women he loves and results in an accidental death.

The old (to the English) ways of the Catholic church are of no help, as their seemingly random rules about how a man dies serve merely to torture his father and hinder him at a crucial moment. Hamlet teeters between two worlds-- the old and the new, Catholic and Protestant, passion and reason-- but with all these schools of thought he finds no one guiding star. In the end he throws all this away and follows his heart when it matters. Not his passion for revenge, but a simple act of stopping someone who is a danger to him and apparently everyone else. A modern hero, who thinks when he can and acts when he must.

Unfortunately, his struggle ends in the same place as that of the other characters, who are caught up in their own dramas with their own struggles of right and wrong and what to do. Perhaps this is one reason why this play resonates so much with all of us. In this mirror it holds up to us, we see ourselves, struggling and often failing, and in the end, meeting the same fate. "What a piece of work is man."

- Jill Swanson

Black Swan Events

Presents

HAMLET

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Direction/Sound Design.....Andrew Matthews
Stage Management & Properties....Angelica Manez
Costume Design.....Cherie Weed
Technical Direction.....Thomas Fernandes
Make-up Design.....Devyn Ray
Dramaturgy.....Jill Swanson
Music Composition.....Bobby Tahouri
Fight Choreography.. Ryan Crowder, Toby Minor
Fight Direction.....Toby Minor
Publicity Photographer.....Daniel Brock
Program Design.....Nancy & Jason Scalise

STAFF

Artistic Director/Executive Producer....Justin Scalise
Production Manager.....Andrea Smith
Cemetery Director.....Dale Flatt

*The show runs approximately 3 hours, including
one 15 minute intermission*