I HATE HAMLET

by Marti Going

Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet is given a comedic twist in Paul Rudnick's play, I Hate Hamlet. After a young TV actor finds himself playing Hamlet, he rents an apartment once owned by legendary actor John Barrymore for inspiration. Barrymore's ghost reveals himself and from that moment on, Andrew Rally's life is no longer his own. Humor ensues as Andrew wrestles with Barrymore, his own expectations and the expectations of everyone else.

Playhouse Tulsa, known for its award-winning productions, has produced several Shakespeare plays in the past, including Macbeth, which won the 2011 Tulsa Award for Theatre Excellence (TATE) for Outstanding Play, and The Tempest, the 2012 TATE second runner-up. But they have never attempted Hamlet, let alone poked fun at it.

"All the Shakespeare plays that we have done, most recently Othello, have been these heavy, dark stories. So to take this turn with Hamlet will be really funny," explains Courtney Sanders, Playhouse's artistic director.

Apart from balancing the rest of their season, which includes two dramas, a family show, and a Christmas production, Sanders knew I Hate Hamlet was the perfect fit for Playhouse from the first time she read it.

"There were certain individuals that I could hear in my head as I read the script, so I knew this show was perfect for the cast we have."

Along with being well-versed comedians, the actors that make up the six-person cast are all Playhouse veterans. Will Acker takes the role of Andrew Rally. Tyler Humphries, who has been in every Shakespeare play Playhouse has presented, is the ghost of Barrymore. Tony Schneider plays Greg, a cocky L.A. producer. Jenny Guy plays Felicia, a real estate broker who performs the séance revealing Barrymore; and Tabitha Littlefield plays Deirdre, Andrew's girlfriend who is committed to "saving herself" for marriage. Barbara Murn is Lillian, a real estate agent who had an affair with Barrymore years ago in Andrew's apartment.

The relationship between Andrew and Barrymore is a unique one, in part because Andrew is the only one who can see him. Although Barrymore becomes a mentor to Andrew, there is always a level of competition between the two. Barrymore, a well-known actor of the early 20th century and grandfather to Drew Barrymore, was famous for playing Hamlet, while Andrew, who has never performed Shakespeare, gets to live a life that Barrymore, quite literally, doesn't get to anymore. Some of their tension is released on stage when Barrymore attempts to teach Andrew to sword fight.

"With stage combat, it has to look violent without actually being violent," Sanders says. "We choreograph it like a dance... a rather intense dance."

Silly swordplay, off-beat characters and plenty of laughs aren't the only elements of I Hate Hamlet that make it worth seeing. Says Sanders, "In addition to all of the humor and mayhem, the play is full of heart. No matter how outlandish their antics, these people get under your skin in the best possible way."

I HATE HAMLET

Presented by Playhouse Tulsa
September 6-7, 12-14 at 7:30 p.m.
September 8 at 2 p.m.
John H. Williams Theatre
Tickets are $24; $21 for students and seniors, $9 for children.
MyTicketOffice.com and 918-596-7111

September 2013 INTERMISSION 19