

***Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Teatro São Pedro, Porto Alegre, Brazil. Directed by Ron Daniels**

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Teatro São Pedro was established in 1857 as a professional theatre company in Porto Alegre, Brazil, with a stated mission to present “classical, contemporary, and new works of theatre, musical theatre, dance and opera,” and was finalized as a municipal theatre of Brazil in June 1858. The theatre maintains a small resident company of performers, directors, designers, and other staff and presents a varied repertoire of plays and musical works on a year-long basis. *Hamlet* was directed by celebrated English director Ron Daniels and featured a strong ensemble of national Brazilian actors, each with strong credits in the area of film and television and with training in classical and realistic acting styles. The production on May 24, 2013, played to a sold-out audience and received a well-deserved standing ovation at its completion.



Thiago Lacerda in the title role as Hamlet. Photo: Joao Caldas.

Featuring three levels of box seats with an extensive orchestra on the main floor, the gorgeous Teatro São Pedro is an architectural wonder of the neoclassical Spanish/South American tradition. Forestage doors, classic relics of 18th-century Spanish traditional theatres, were utilized throughout the production with great success, while the three levels of balcony seats allowed the entire audience close contact with the actors. Whereas Shakespearean productions in the contemporary era often rely on spectacle and scenic effects, Daniels's production of *Hamlet* relied on a brisk pace, the careful building of action, and a nearly complete absence of scenery or props (less than ten pieces of scenery total). The play was presented on a bare stage with two large drops and, in the spirit of Elizabethan production standards, used contemporary Brazilian costumes.

The leading character of *Hamlet* was played by Thiago Lacerda, a highly regarded Brazilian film actor who had been a professional swimmer and model in Rio de Janeiro until he was discovered for a major film role while in college. Lacerda has been for many years the leading television actor on the Globo Network in Brazil, and he really excelled in the title role of this classical play. His primary stance on the character was that of a malcontent, a satirical character who used numerous tactics to undermine Claudius's reign. Hamlet's journey eventually shifted from a blend of comedy and anger to that of the comic clown. During intermission, and just before the arrival of the players of "The Mousetrap," the character Hamlet sat on stage in front of



Hamlet (Thiago Lacerda) prepares to duel Laertes (Andre Hendges) in the final scene. Photo: Joao Caldas.



Hamlet (Thiago Lacerda) in the graveyard scene with Yorick. Photo: Joao Caldas.

a small mirror and makeup kit and put on white face makeup and red lips and nose (clown makeup) for the scene with the players. This clownish antic carried the action through the end of the “Mousetrap” scene to just before the Ophelia burial scene, where Hamlet washed off the makeup in a tub of water, thus allowing Claudius the opportunity to punish him and

dunk his head in the water to near drowning. Following that scene, which Hamlet escaped, the play led into its natural tragic conclusion.

Claudius, played by veteran Brazilian actor Eduardo Semerjian, was revealed at the play’s outset as a military dictator surrounded by a chorus of “yes men” who supported his corrupt regime. An actor of strong vocal and physical power, Semerjian is also a highly successful Brazilian film and television actor whose simple realistic style of acting served to make him a real person, a sympathetic villain whose desire for power was driven by his desire to bring the state to a more powerful strategic position in the world, a phenomenon not entirely unheard of in South American politics. Another actor



Thiago Lacerda as Hamlet pleads with Selma Egrel as Gertrude in the bedroom scene in *Hamlet*. Photo: Joao Caldas.



Thiago Lacerda feigns madness as the title role in *Hamlet*. Photo: Joao Caldas.

who excelled was celebrated Brazilian film actor Antonio Petrin, who played the three roles of the Ghost, Leading Actor, and Gravedigger. A multipurpose character actor, Petrin was most obviously a trained stage actor and played these roles as a character actor of versatility, each one with very different characterization and style. Petrin's vocal inflection and comic timing added the necessary comic elements to this production. Finally, Anna Guilhermina, a popular Brazilian soap opera actress, was wonderfully naïve and crazed as Ophelia as she went through an incredible journey on her

way to suicide. She wore an edgy sheer costume that revealed her naked body underneath in the crazed scene. The novelty of having Guilhermina, Lacerda, and other major Brazilian film stars in this production added to its success as a showcase of major Brazilian actors embracing a Shakespearean classic.

Overall this was a highly successful production of *Hamlet* and one that honored Elizabethan standards while embracing South American politics and society. The text was cut to a mere two hours and fifteen minutes, which is something of a feat for Shakespeare's longest play. Producer Francisco Margues made a number of theatrically sound decisions, including the hiring of director Daniels, casting, and scenic minimalism. The production's immense success owed to those solid choices.

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