



## I Hate Hamlet Proves Perfect “Classic” Comedy for Colorado Shakespeare Festival

by Jim Volz. Written on 2014-08-17. First published in the *ISE Chronicle*.

For the production: I HATE HAMLET (2014, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, USA).

COLORADO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL FORAYS INTO MORE CONTEMPORARY WORK ARE A relatively recent phenomenon as there was significant angst during the early years of the Festival when it came to straying from the Bard.

Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* (first produced in England in 1606) was the first to break with CSF tradition in 1972 and it took two decades before what many considered a perilous plunge into non-Shakespearean work to once again surface on Colorado Shakespeare stages on the University of Colorado campus.

Fast-forward to summer, 2014, and the non-traditionalists are at it again—this time with an entertaining Boulder, Colorado twist. Paul Rudnick’s comic romp *I Hate Hamlet* is all about the fateful casting of a young television actor as Hamlet (who is haunted by the ghost of stage and screen star John Barrymore). In a fascinating bit of serendipity, Colorado Shakespeare dramaturg Roxxy Duda discovered a treasure trove of Barrymore’s belongings in the University of Colorado library archive. Boxes of Barrymore historical documents including the contents of his wallet at the time of his death and correspondence with George Bernard Shaw were evidently donated to the university by a friend of the legendary actor. What great source material for tackling a play!

It may not be Shakespeare but it is a whole lot of fun. Colorado Shakespeare Festival Producing Artistic Director Timothy Orr assembled a marvelous ensemble to join the otherwise Shakespearean summer season (*The Tempest*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry IV, Parts I and II*) and guides them with aplomb. Sam Gregory is riotously bold, cocky and debonair as Barrymore’s ghost. Alex Esola plays Andrew Rally, the conflicted television star gauchely cast as Hamlet at the New York Shakespeare Festival (for his commercial appeal). Esola is gratifyingly confused, cloying, and charming as he struggles with Barrymore and his impending opening night.

The overall ensemble adds to the joy of the production. Martha Harmon Pardee, as the realtor who tracks down Barrymore's New York apartment, and Jamie Ann Romero (who plays Rally's girlfriend) add mirth and a touch of reality to Rudnick's farce. Stephen Cole Hughes threatens to steal the show as Rally's writer/producer/director friend who shamelessly and hilariously tempts Rally into returning to his tv roots. Anne Sandoe is very funny and delightfully cast as the actor's agent, Lillian Troy.

Scenic designer Caitlin Ayer creates one wonderful New York apartment that provides usable levels, ample playing space, and a host of visuals evoking an earlier era of Broadway. Katie Horney's costumes are lively and interesting and the rest of the key artistic team (Jason Banks, Jason Ducat, Amy Chini, Geoffrey Kent and Roxxy Duda) all contributed to the success of the production. Of course, it's director Timothy Orr who cast, shaped, timed, and produced the general merriment and, more importantly, successfully risked infuriating the masses with a "contemporary classic" that would most certainly have made Shakespeare smile.

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