

A · N E W · P L A Y

# BERNHARDT/HAMLET



**ROUNDAABOUT  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**

**UPSTAGE GUIDE**

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**EDUCATION AT  
ROUNDAABOUT**

Photo: Jake Chessum

# UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



## BERNHARDT/HAMLET

By Theresa Rebeck

Directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel

Mark Twain wrote: "There are five kinds of actresses: bad actresses, fair actresses, good actresses, great actresses. And then there is Sarah Bernhardt." In 1897, the international stage celebrity set out to tackle her most ambitious role yet: Hamlet. Theresa Rebeck's new play rollicks with high comedy and human drama, set against the lavish Shakespearean production that could make or break Bernhardt's career. Janet McTeer, "one of the finest classical actresses of her generation" (*The Telegraph*), brings the legendary leading lady to life.

### A NOTE FROM **ARTISTIC DIRECTOR** **TODD HAIMES**

Sarah Bernhardt's real-life portrayal of Hamlet has become a landmark moment in theatre history, but behind every cultural milestone lies immense personal risk. For Bernhardt, then, Hamlet is more than just a role. He is her ultimate challenge and her archnemesis, the only thing standing between her and the promise of true immortality. With piercing wit and fierce humanity, Theresa Rebeck explores the sacrifices necessary to shatter centuries of tradition, take on the untouchable, and command one's own legacy.

#### **WHEN**      **WHERE**

1897

Paris, France

#### **WHO**

**Sarah Bernhardt:** A celebrated French stage actress known for her eccentric lifestyle

**Edmond Rostand:** A playwright completely transfixed by Sarah

**Constant Coquelin:** The leading man in Sarah's troupe, he has played every role in the canon

**Alphonse Mucha:** A famous artist

**Louis:** The leading theatre critic of Paris

**Lysette:** The pretty ingénue of Sarah's troupe

**Raoul:** An actor in Sarah's troupe

**Francois:** An actor in Sarah's troupe

**Maurice:** Sarah's devoted son

**Rosamond:** Rostand's neglected wife





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# INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT THERESA REBECK



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Playwright Theresa Rebeck about her work on *Bernhardt/Hamlet*.

**Ted Sod:** What inspired you to write *Bernhardt/Hamlet*? This play was commissioned by Roundabout—are there any specific challenges in writing a commissioned play?

**Theresa Rebeck:** The inspiration happened during a trip to Prague. My family is from Czechia and Slovakia, so we went there to experience the culture for ourselves and encountered those gorgeous prints by Alphonse Mucha. You can actually buy full-size copies of his work at the Mucha museum! We got one of Sarah Bernhardt playing Medea, with her children's bodies swimming at her feet, that still hangs next to my front door. It used to terrify my children, but they got over it. Her eyes really are so haunting in that poster. As a theatre artist, of course you're always aware of Sarah Bernhardt, but that poster was the real inspiration for me to write a play about her. Jill Rafson approached me about writing a play for the Roundabout, and when I described my thoughts they immediately commissioned the play. I'm honored that the Roundabout has supported this play—a play about how difficult it is to mount a production in a professional theatre!—and commend them for giving new work an opportunity on the big stage.

**TS:** Will you give us a sense of the kind of research you had to do in order to write this play and how you went about doing it?

**TR:** Unfortunately, film came around right at the end of Sarah's career, and there's only one video of her acting—and the video's quality is really not great—but there is a wealth of resources about her out there (there's even a book specifically about her playing Hamlet). In my research I also learned about her important collaborations with Edmond Rostand and their relationship. I also read a lot of her own writing and included some of it in the play. She was quite brilliant and had a lot to say about acting and celebrity, which is very much at the center of the play. But this isn't a history play by any means. The truth of her playing Hamlet, the fundamental questions and ramifications of her character, isn't located in the exact dates of performances and birthdays, or the specificities around what exactly she said and when she said it. The research I did was all in service of putting a character on the stage: what kind of person she was, what infuriated her, what made her rapturous, what are the essential questions of the event itself.

**TS:** Will you talk about the development process for this play? Do you expect to continue to rewrite throughout the upcoming RTC process? If so, what type of events usually motivate your revisions during rehearsals or previews?

**TR:** I don't anticipate any major rewrites. We've done several readings and a workshop of the play at the end of June; it feels ready for rehearsal. Even so, when someone comes up with a good idea, I tend to just write it in. Being in the room with bright, creative professionals really spurs the writing process and makes rewriting not only intellectually stimulating—really engaging with the play, finding ways to make it shine brighter and brighter—but an absolute blast as well.



**TS:** Janet McTeer has been cast in the role of Sarah Bernhardt and has been involved in various developmental readings. Can you tell us what that collaboration has been like?

**TR:** It is an astonishing privilege to work with Janet McTeer. We knew going in that we would need someone who could not only portray the greatest actress of the 19th century, but also the greatest actress of the 19th century in the greatest production of *Hamlet* of the 19th century. She's all of that and more. She's funny, smart, vulnerable, frustrated, strong—she has so many colors, and she's mercurial, dazzling. She's thrown herself in head-first to discover this character, and from day one she made incredibly prescient observations about who this person was and what drove her. I'm incredibly grateful to have her onboard.

**TS:** Your play deals with how successful women are often vilified or penalized for having traits that are celebrated in men. How some women are criticized for prioritizing their career over being a parent. The play also makes some very salient points about gender and sexual politics. Why were you interested in writing about these subjects?

**TR:** You know, it's a topic that unfortunately just doesn't seem to go away. She was certainly the greatest actor of her time, and even so, the questions all came up. She was getting a little too old for the ingénue parts, and the parts that she should have been offered when she was at the height of her powers just weren't out there. She had no choice but to start playing men, and she walked straight into that old canard that men can play women but

**"THE GREAT FRENCH TRAGEDIENNE MAY HAVE BEEN MISGUIDED IN ATTEMPTING TO PLAY HAMLET, BUT SHE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY AMONG THE PIONEERS WHO SET THEMSELVES THE TASK OF RESCUING SHAKESPEARE'S PRINCE FROM THE MESHES OF ROMANTIC CRITICISM AND INTERPRETATION."**

**- M. MAURICE SHUDOKSY, ACADEMIC**

a woman can't play a man—it's in print! I wish I could say things have changed from Sarah's time, but they haven't, really. In our time, it's perhaps a little subtler, but the problem has come back with new teeth. Radically overqualified women still don't receive the opportunities and positions they deserve. I write about gender politics so often because they're perennially relevant. The world is what it is. I write what I see.

**TS: Another idea in the play is how theatre is an act of self-transformation or self-invention—what intrigued you about this particular idea?**

**TR:** I've been writing plays since I was very young—since I was practically a kid—and at a certain point everything you write becomes, in some way, about your process. In a lot of ways, this is a play about creating theatre, about the process of creating a character and internalizing him, about the existential dread and joy of searching, searching, and finally finding it. So what interested me about self-transformation and self-invention, well, I've been thinking about it for years! It's constantly in the back of my mind as I'm creating theatre.

**TS: How have you been collaborating with the director, Moritz von Stuelpnagel?**

**TR:** We met because Moritz had wanted to do a revival of one of my early plays, *Spike Heels*, for a long time. We're still hoping to do that, but until we get further along he directed readings of a few of my plays, and we immediately got offers to do full versions of them. So there was an element of kismet involved. Our partnership did move a little more quickly than we anticipated, but that's largely because there's a natural affinity between the two of us. He's really funny and excellent with language. He treats everyone, actors, producers, writers, very professionally and with a great deal of kindness, which is so important to me. He leaves lots of room for me to work with the play and with the actors, but he's also completely capable of taking the show in his hands.

**TS: What other projects are you working on? What are you most excited about writing next?**

**TR:** I have a couple of movies coming out soon. I wrote, directed, and produced *Trouble*, which stars Bill Pullman and Anjelica Huston as a brother and sister feuding over a patch of family land. David Morse is also in the cast. There's also *355*, which stars Jessica Chastain, Marion Cotillard, Lupita Nyong'o, Penelope Cruz, and Fan Bingbing as members of a spy agency. That was just announced a few months ago, and I'm very excited to be writing the screenplay. I'm also very happy to be at work on my fourth novel, which deals with the effects of globalization, increasing interdependence, and the consolidation of power and money in the hands of the few.

**TS: You have been a respected member of the theatre community for almost 30 years. What changes or developments have intrigued or excited you? What work is left to be done from your point of view?**

**TR:** When I started, there were very few plays by women being done at major theatres. Almost none. It felt like there was a vacuum, and that there was a real need for women's voices, so

as a female playwright, I felt like I had something to bring to the conversation. But they weren't exactly excited to see us, even after Emily Mann and Tina Howe and Marsha Norman and Wendy Wasserstein had made such breakthroughs. When #MeToo took off earlier this year, I think a lot of the obstacles and the issues women have had to negotiate started to become more apparent—and I do think there's more openness, more willingness to discuss—but there's still much to be done. It still feels like we're not fully listening to or valuing each other as artists and collaborators and friends. I look forward to continuing this conversation and pulling up work that's historically been pushed down, and I think now is the time to do it.

**TS: Did you have any teachers who had a profound impact on you as an artist?**

**TR:** Oh, I had so many teachers that meant so much to me along the way. But I'll mention one specifically, who gave me advice that has stayed with me for years. My dissertation adviser at Brandeis was a man named Timo Gilmore. He wasn't in the theatre department; he was a literary scholar who knew everything about early American literature—he was a big *Moby Dick* expert. He looked like a fire-and-brimstone preacher from the 1700s, like John Edwards or George Whitefield; he was a really intense guy. At first, he scared me to death with his intelligence, but I came to see his wisdom and his warmth. He was so personally proud of me when I started to have plays produced; he gave me a lot of courage. And then one day we met up, in Boston, I hadn't seen him for a while and we were having a coffee, and I had been bumped around rather cruelly by a few truly insane notices, and he could see how upset I was. I'll never forget sitting in that coffee shop, feeling just horrible, and he said to me, "I sense that they've gotten into your head, Theresa. You must not let them. All of that is simply noise." It was good advice. They still get into my head, of course, but I also have Timo in there saying, "Don't let them. Do your work." It's nice, that he's there in my head, when I need him. •





# THE LIFE, LEGENDS, AND LEGACY OF SARAH BERNHARDT



## WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, SARAH BERNHARDT?

Who Sarah Bernhardt thought she was, or wanted the world to think she was, did not always align with the facts. Myth was her currency, and it certainly paid off. At the close of the 19th century, she was known as the most publicized and richest actress. She captivated the world with her larger than life personality and scandalous escapades. Her intuitive understanding of “brand management” plus her extraordinary success as an actor and entrepreneur established the blueprint for the stars of today.

## SARAH THE ACTRESS

Bernhardt’s life did not start out auspiciously. While the official records of her birth were destroyed in a fire, it is confirmed that she was born Henriette-Rosine Bernard in 1844, the fatherless daughter of a Dutch-Jewish courtesan.

Despite her Jewish lineage, she spent much of her childhood at convent school, even declaring that she wanted to become a nun. One of her mother’s lovers, Charles Duc de Morny, the illegitimate half-brother of Napoleon III, suggested that 16-year-old Sarah’s temperament was better suited for the theatre. He pulled some strings and paid for her to attend the Paris Conservatory. When she failed to impress her teachers, Morny again used his influence to secure Bernhardt a spot in the Comédie-Française, France’s prestigious national theatre company.

Bernhardt made her debut on August 31, 1862 in the title role of Racine’s *Iphigénie*. She was decidedly not a hit. After the curtain call, when she asked her teacher for forgiveness, he remarked, “I can forgive you, and you’ll eventually forgive yourself, but Racine in his grave never will.” Her poor performance, coupled with her constant stage fright and histrionics, led to an altercation in which she slapped a senior actress in the company. Thus, Bernhardt’s reputation as a diva was born.

Over the next few years she worked on her craft and in 1868 had a breakout hit with the revival of Alexandre Dumas’s play *Kean*. Her skill—and box office draw—was so great that Comédie-Française welcomed her back into the troupe in 1872.

Bernhardt played at least 70 roles in 125 plays over the course of her career, both female and male. Most popular were her dramatic death scenes. She played 19-year-old



This photograph of Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet was used on postcards. It depicts Hamlet contemplating Yorick’s skull in the famous graveyard scene.

Joan of Arc when she was 46. At 55, she signed a 25-year lease on a theatre in Paris, renaming it Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. She continued to tour the world late in life, even giving a recital at San Quentin Prison. After her right leg was amputated, she continued to perform on stage as well as for the troops on the battlefield of World War I. She did not use a prosthetic limb. Instead, she relied upon strategically placed set pieces as she moved across the stage, or was carried about on a satin sedan chair in the style of Louis XV.

Always on the cutting edge, she starred in several silent films. Though she died in 1923 before talking movies were made, many consider her the most famous actress the world has ever known. A million people lined the streets of Paris to bid her adieu as her coffin made its way to Père Lachaise cemetery.

Click [HERE](#) to watch Bernhardt as Hamlet fencing with Laertes.

To learn more about the Comédie-Française, one of the world’s oldest still-operating theatres, click [HERE](#).

**" THE THREE WOMEN I HAVE MOST ADMIRER IN MY LIFE ARE SARAH BERNHARDT, LILLIE LANGTRY, AND QUEEN VICTORIA. I WOULD HAVE MARRIED ANY ONE OF THEM WITH PLEASURE."**

**- OSCAR WILDE**



Sarah Bernhardt wearing her taxidermied bat hat around 1880.

### A MYTHIC LIFE

Coffin bed.  
Taxidermied bat hat. Amputated leg. Lovers aplenty. Sarah Bernhardt was known for many things besides her onstage talents.

At the age of 20, her son Maurice was born, as was her reputation as a scandalous woman. It wasn't until she was quite famous that

Henri Prince de Ligne offered to formally recognize Maurice as his son. Maurice politely declined, explaining that he was content to be the son of Sarah Bernhardt.

In 1882, Bernhardt proposed to and married Aristides Damalas, a Greek military man, 11 years her junior. She hired him to perform with her, but he preferred spending her money, having affairs, and taking morphine. Though they separated, the pair stayed married until he died of a drug overdose in 1899.



The front page of sheet music to the "Sarah Bernhardt Polka," published in Boston in 1880, highlights her global fame.

Bernhardt wanted everything associated with the good life, including her exotic pet collection, which was said to include a boa constrictor,

a lion, a parrot, a puma, two horses, a monkey named Darwin and an alligator named Ali Gaga whom she served milk and champagne, ultimately sending him to an early grave. Bernhardt also spent outrageous sums of money paying off the many gambling debts of her son, Maurice.

Over the course of her life, Sarah turned many more co-stars into lovers. She was also muse to many, including Oscar Wilde, Edmond Rostand, and Marcel Proust. She evolved from muse to maker, developing her talents in writing, painting, and sculpture. Louise Abbéma, an expressionist painter with whom Sarah had her most notable same-sex affair, was a fan of her work. Bernhardt still has many fans today—in 2017, a white marble relief of Ophelia made and signed by Bernhardt sold at auction for \$385,444.

### THE WORLD'S FIRST CELEBRITY

Sarah Bernhardt seemed to understand that ubiquity enhanced celebrity. She posed for many artists, ensuring that her image would be seen all around the world in paintings, sculptures, photographs, and graphic designs, like Alphonse Mucha's famous Art Nouveau posters. Victor Hugo, with whom she had an affair when he was 70 and she just 27, nicknamed her "The Golden Voice." So, in 1910, she visited Thomas Edison in West Orange, New Jersey to record her most famous and moving tragic role, a scene from Jean Racine's 1677 tragedy *Phèdre*. She also loaned her name and image to real estate ventures in the Bronx and endorsed products from face powder to aperitifs.

Sarah Bernhardt developed one of the Western world's first cults of personality. In 1906 the French breeder Monsieur Lemoine cultivated the Sarah Bernhardt Peony, the most showy variety. In 1960, Sarah was posthumously honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. In 2001, Martha Stewart shared a recipe for Sarah Bernhardt cookies, claiming they are as "multilayered as their namesake." Love her or hate her, everyone knew her name. Over 100 years later, people still do. •

Listen to Thomas Edison's recording of Sarah Bernhardt [HERE](#).

Get Martha Stewart's recipe for Sarah Bernhardt's cookies [HERE](#).

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JANET McTEER



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Actor Janet McTeer about her work in *Bernhardt/Hamlet*.

**Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? When did you decide you wanted to become an actor? Did you have any teachers who had a profound impact on you?**

**Janet McTeer:** I was born in Newcastle, in the north of England, to a family completely unrelated to my profession—how I managed to be an actor I've no idea! I caught my bus from school outside the local theatre and used to have coffee there. I just loved the place and got a job selling coffees there on a Saturday, so somehow got in to see all the plays. That made me decide to try to act, having only ever done one school play at the age of 13. I knew I had to give it a try, and luckily my family were wonderfully supportive. My two English teachers, Mrs. Green and Mrs. Surgener, were amazing. I loved them dearly, and they were an enormous help in my choosing speeches for my auditions.

**TS: Why did you choose to play the title role in Theresa Rebeck's *Bernhardt/Hamlet*?**

**JM:** I was sent the play to do a reading of it and loved it immediately. It has wit, charm, interest, and the characters are fabulous. Since then we have done three readings and a workshop as Theresa has been honing the play.

**TS: I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your preliminary thoughts about the role of Sarah Bernhardt? What made her such an enduring icon? What do you find most challenging and exciting about this role? What kind of preparation or research do you have to do, in order to play this role? How do you approach a historical character who has so much myth surrounding her?**

**JM:** Sarah is, of course, an amazing icon. She paved the way for so many other actresses. She was an eccentric, forceful character. How much of her eccentricity was a clever use of publicity and how much her own—who can say? That will be a fun part of rehearsals! As she got older, she was appalled at the lack of great roles for older actresses, so decided just to play some of the men's parts... hmmm, where have I heard that resounding complaint before??? I love that about her. What is exciting is attempting to embody this amazing person—gulp—whilst also showing her rehearsal process. I have read several books about her, trying to find the similarities between her and myself, somewhere deep down. When playing a historical figure, all you can do is attempt to meet them somewhere in the middle, between them and you. Otherwise, it would simply be a parody or a copy, not a rounded character from a deep place. As for the myth...take what is universally accepted, interpret what is assumed and helpful, and ditch the rest.

**TS: What do you think the play is about? It tackles the idea that successful women are often treated with disdain when they display traits that are celebrated in men. It also suggests that theatre is an act of transformation for both artists and audiences. Any preliminary thoughts on either subject as you are about to begin rehearsals?**



Janet McTeer

**JM:** The play is a celebration of Bernhardt and a celebration of the process of rehearsal, of women who refuse to take the common tack and fade gracefully away, of humor, of irreverence for the common way, of passion, and love, and theatre. All of which I thoroughly applaud.

**TS: Can you talk about the relationship between Sarah and her son, Maurice? Do you see Sarah as having prioritized her career over being a parent? What do you think motivated Bernhardt to play the title role in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? She doesn't seem to care for the character as Shakespeare wrote him—what do you think her attraction to the role is? How do you understand the relationship between Sarah and her lover, playwright Edmond Rostand? Is it simply transactional?**

**JM:** Hmmm...hard to judge a parent...especially since we truthfully know only facts and report. What we do know is that they absolutely adored each other and lived often in each other's pockets. She gave him masses of money, adored it when she was a grandmother, didn't speak to him for a year over a political disagreement, and she died in his arms. She sounds like an adoring, irritating, unusual, interesting, inspirational, infuriating, endlessly entertaining, iconic mother, and that doesn't sound too bad to me.

*Hamlet* has the greatest words ever written—who wouldn't want to play him? I don't think she hates the words as written...remember almost all Shakespeare plays are seen now in a trimmed and cut version. I recently did an all-female *The Taming of the Shrew* and we cut it



**"SOME WISH TO SEE IN HAMLET A WOMANISH, HESITATING, FLIGHTY MIND.  
TO ME HE SEEMS A MANLY, RESOLUTE, BUT THOUGHTFUL BEING."**

**- SARAH BERNHARDT**



Janet McTeer in rehearsal for Bernhardt/Hamlet



probably in half...what's so different? She's just wrestling with, as she says, too many words. She went on to perform it many times extremely successfully, so...

No one really knows what her relationship with Rostand was. She clearly had many lovers, so why shouldn't he have been one? They did stay friends for many, many years, and for the purpose of this play and to show that side of her character—she clearly loves him.

**TS: How do you like to collaborate with a writer on a new work? Can you describe what the development process has been like for you on this play?**

**JM:** It's been fabulous. Theresa Rebeck is wonderful: open, amusing, furiously clever, collaborative, and delightful. Moritz, the director, and Theresa and I have been open with ideas, opinions, questions, and themes—all of which she has taken on board, if only as food for thought. It has been a joy.

**TS: What do you look for from a director when collaborating on a new play?**

**JM:** Intelligence, openness, a willingness to collaborate, i.e., not to have fixed ideas, and to do it all with a good grace and humor! All of which Moritz has in spades. He, too, is a joy.

**TS: What keeps you inspired as an artist? Public school students will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a very successful actress—what advice can you give young people who want to act?**

**JM:** I am constantly surprised by the amount of talented amazing people there are, both young and old, and as long as something grabs me, it just does. Why do some paintings or pieces of music grab us the way others don't? Perhaps because they reflect something in ourselves, or a dream we have, or a reason we can't put our finger on? Some things just grab you. Perhaps the mystery is the fun. And some things you do to pay the mortgage, let's be honest—the trick is to attempt to do both!

My advice to anyone wanting to be an actor: if it's the only thing you can possibly think you want to do...do it. If there are other things you want to do, don't do it. It's a tough profession. Self-employed, endless auditions—particularly when young. Far too much travel, which can be fun, yet is often simply exhausting, being away from the people you love. In other words, the price is high—so if you aren't prepared to pay it—don't. But if you are and it works—it's fabulous—it's the very best! The people, the work, the art, the fun, the never getting bored, the massive, massive fulfillment and gratification when a job goes well. But be prepared to work hard. Very, very hard. If you're young and starting out, put the work in all the time. And write this on a post-it note and put it on your mirror—or have it as your screensaver: "Someone has to succeed. There's no reason why it shouldn't be me." Good luck. When it's grand, it's truly grand, and there is always, always room for young talent. Always. •

# THE WORLD OF THE PLAY: PARIS IN 1897



The real-life production of *Hamlet* that starred Sarah Bernhardt took place in 1897 in a theatre in Paris that Bernhardt owned, operated, and even named after herself: Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt. While *Bernhardt/Hamlet* is mostly set in and around this theatre, an examination of the political and cultural climate outside its walls in the final decades of the 19th century can help us better understand the events of this play.

## THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR AND THE FRENCH THIRD REPUBLIC

Nearly thirty years before the events of *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, Emperor Napoleon III's Second French Empire declared war against the Kingdom of Prussia, aiming to halt Prussia's efforts to unify the independent German states of Europe into one German nation. This attempt to protect France's political and military hegemony in Europe backfired, however, as Prussia responded with unexpected military prowess, invading France and driving Napoleon to a disastrous defeat at the Battle of Sedan in 1870. Soon thereafter, the Second French Empire was overthrown and replaced with the French Third Republic, which became France's official system of government. In 1875, this Republican government enacted a set of constitutional laws, establishing a President of the Republic and a two-chamber legislative body, which would become France's most democratic system of government to date. Under the Third Republic, the government instituted free public education, deepened the separation between church and state, established a railway system, and provided inexpensive access to newspapers. The Third Republic remained through the end of World War II.

## LA BELLE ÉPOQUE

From the last decade of the 19th century until the outset of World War I, France experienced a golden age that came to be known as *La Belle Époque* ("Beautiful Era"). A time of relative peace in Europe overall, *La Belle Époque* coincided

with the mass availability of electricity and saw an explosion of technological advancements, modern conveniences, and urban developments in France. With the rise of electric street lights, the Paris Metro (subway system), department stores, automobiles, and movies, Paris was transformed into a city of modernity and progress, and it was chosen as the host city for the 1878, 1889, and 1900 World's Fairs, or Expositions Universelles. Though *La Belle Époque* was by no means enjoyed equally among all social classes, it would be remembered during the dark years of World War I as a time of optimism, glamour, and excitement.

## THEATRE IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC

The expanded democracy and heightened cultural fervor of the late 1800s brought an increased demand for popular theatres. In 1864, the French government lifted a Napoleon-era restriction on the number of theatres allowed in Paris, and by 1882 the number of Parisian theatres had increased from 11 to 23. These theatres ranged in size from the massive Comédie-Française, a state theatre established in 1680 by King Louis XIV, to the People's Theatre of the Cooperation of Ideas, a small establishment geared toward providing leisure and intellectual debate for working-class citizens. Theatre was a popular pastime for Paris residents; an 1888 report estimated that 500,000



The Eiffel Tower, photographed soon after its completion in 1889. The Eiffel Tower was built as the entrance gate to the 1889 Exposition Universelle, or World's Fair. It's named for its engineer, Alexandre Gustave Eiffel.

Parisians visited the theatre at least once a week that year, and between 1 and 1.2 million visited at least once a month. (By comparison, in the 2016-17 season, only about 300,000 people attended a Broadway show once or more per month on average.) While the massive expansion of the theatre industry in Paris had levelled off by the end of the century, theatre remained a lucrative business. In addition to its French audience, Parisian theatres drew in citizens from neighboring countries, who travelled great distances to attend the latest show.



**"THE EXISTENCE OF SARAH BERNHARDT REMAINS THE SUPREME MARVEL OF THE 19TH CENTURY. THE ASTOUNDING RANGE SHE EXHIBITED AS AN ACTRESS BAFFLED THE IMAGINATION OF HER PUBLIC."**

**- EDMOND ROSTAND**



## ROMANTICISM

Romanticism, the reigning artistic movement of the day, established itself in French theatre in 1830 with Victor Hugo's spectacularly successful Romantic drama *Hernani*. French Romanticism can generally be characterized as a reaction against Classicism, the major artistic philosophy of the previous centuries, which emphasized a tight balance between reason and emotion in art and strictly adhered to the standards of ancient Greek tragedy. Romanticism, on the other hand, leaned towards naturalistic narration and explored more deeply the complexities of the individual spirit. Romantic artists, though still interested in a well-structured composition of story, departed from the Greek unities, which set strict limits on the time, location, and action of a "proper" drama. With the Romantic movement came an increase in artistic freedom; as Victor Hugo wrote, "Romanticism is Liberalism in literature." •



The Palais Garnier opera house, photographed around 1900. The Palais Garnier, completed in 1875, was one of the theatres constructed during *La Belle Époque*.

## A SELECTION OF BERNHARDT'S ROLES

### LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS

One of Bernhardt's most popular roles was Marguerite Gautier, a courtesan with a heart of gold and a fatal case of consumption. Marguerite gives up the only man she ever loved to save his bourgeoisie family from scandal but reunites with him on her deathbed. Based on the novel by Alexandre Dumas fils, the 1852 play was an international success. Bernhardt first played Marguerite in 1880 and continued through 1913.

### LORENZACCIO

The sprawling 1834 play by Romantic poet and playwright Alfred de Musset was not produced until Bernhardt took it on in 1896. The male role of Lorenzo de Medici, who murders his tyrant cousin, seemed a promising vehicle for Bernhardt, but critics did not laud the play.

### LA SAMARITAINE

Edmond Rostand's biblical drama initially had a short but successful

run during Easter of 1897. Rostand wrote the lead character Photina—an ancient Palestinian woman who becomes a follower of Jesus and converts her tribe to Christianity—for Bernhardt. It remained one of her favorite characters, and she revived the play several times.

### CYRANO DE BERGERAC

Set in 17th century Paris, Rostand's verse drama features the large-nosed Cyrano, who gives his voice and poems to a handsome but inarticulate rival to woo beautiful Roxane, whom he secretly loves. The 1897 premiere received an hour-long ovation. Bernhardt did not originate Roxane but played her on tour in 1900.

### L'AIGLON

In what would become a signature role, Bernhardt played the son of Napoleon I, whose nickname was "the little Eagle" or "Eaglet." Rostand wrote the historic, six-act drama for Bernhardt in 1900, and she was



Alphonse Mucha's poster for the 1896 production of *La Dame aux Camélias* was one of Bernhardt's favorites.

praised by critics upon its premiere. The play exemplified Romanticism and celebrated the glory of Napoleon's victories.



# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MORITZ VON STUELPNAGEL



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Director Moritz von Stuelpnagel about his work on *Bernhardt/Hamlet*.

**Ted Sod:** Let's start with some biographical information: Where were you born and educated? What made you decide to become a theatre director?

**Moritz von Stuelpnagel:** I was born in Greenwich, Connecticut to a pair of wonderful German immigrants who wanted my name to be as incomprehensibly German as possible. My father was in finance and my mother a visual artist (as well as the director of exhibitions at the Bruce Museum), so I joke that directing perfectly blends their influences of practicality and conceptualization. I actually stumbled into directing because my high school happened to have a terrific performing arts department, including an evening of ten-minute plays written, directed, and performed by the students. It's a total privilege that I had access to that. And something about being in direct conversation with the writers and actors, on subject matter that was immediately resonant for us, sparked something in me that felt both empowering and humbling. To watch those first plays from the back of the house, as well as watching the audience watch those plays, was to be part of something larger than myself, and I knew I wanted to commit myself to the service of new writers.

**TS:** Tell us about your response to the script of *Bernhardt/Hamlet*. How did it resonate for you personally? What do you think the play is about?

**MVS:** I'm fascinated by the questions this play asks about our ability to really, truly see one another, or even see into ourselves. That's one of the vital roles the theatre plays: to witness one another, to recognize ourselves. Does an audience's presumptions about women prevent them from regarding a woman's tragedy the same as a man's? Can I find Hamlet in myself? Does my lover see my potential in me, or are they limited by their expectations for me? Bernhardt was one of the early proponents of naturalism, and as such, she asked hard questions about representation in the theatre. We're similarly asking hard questions about representation now. But inside that, inside all the artifice of the theatre, the artists are trying to touch on grains of truth to offer up. Something that pings the soul. It's not easy to discover something truly meaningful, but in that way, I understand Bernhardt's struggle.

**TS:** How are you preparing to direct this play? Did you have to do a lot of research? If so, what did you research specifically?

**MVS:** There's an endless array of material written about Sarah Bernhardt, and because she loved myth as much as truth, it's hard to know which of those stories, if any, are factual. But even the myths are revealing. I've dug through quite a bit of biography and history, and they have informed a lot about the relationships of the characters and the circumstances around this event. But what has felt most useful is immersing myself in her ethos. Bernhardt's belief in the power of theatre, and her willfulness to be at the center of it, crystallize what seems so dynamic about her. It's critical to what drives this play, and it's framed my understanding of the script and how to approach the design. Research is only ever helpful.



Moritz von Stuelpnagel

**TS:** The role of Sarah Bernhardt has been played by Janet McTeer during the development process. Can you talk about collaborating with Janet on her role in this play?

**MVS:** Janet is an incredible collaborator. Like Bernhardt, she has a fire of passion, the spontaneity of wit, and the ferocity of ideas behind her. Not only that, but she's been wonderfully engaged in asking hard questions of the play. Sure, she's taller than Bernhardt was, but the stage can be a great leveler. What's harder to replicate is her spirit. And because many people these days have forgotten or never heard much about Sarah Bernhardt, our focus really is on the ideas that came out of these events, rather than representing them with stringent historical accuracy.

**TS:** Please talk about your understanding of the relationship between Sarah Bernhardt and Edmond Rostand. I am curious what you think motivates both of them?

**MVS:** One of the inspirations for this play was a tremendous book by Francine Prose called *Lives of the Muses*, in which the author examines the relationship between artists and their sometimes more famous (or even infamous) muses. There's this question of whether partnership has the potential to bring about an artist's self-actualization—the best in ourselves—or whether the artist's unfulfilled desire breeds creativity in pursuit of a lover. I think a lot of people romanticize the former; this idea that your personal shortcomings can somehow be mitigated through the healing power of love: two halves make a whole, or the other person will somehow complete you. That can seem really validating. But it's

**"(THE) CHILDISHLY EGOTISTICAL CHARACTER OF HER ACTING, WHICH IS NOT THE ART OF MAKING YOU THINK MORE HIGHLY OR FEEL MORE DEEPLY BUT THE ART OF MAKING YOU ADMIRE HER, PITY HER, CHAMPION HER, WEEP WITH HER, LAUGH AT HER JOKES . . . IT IS THE ART OF FOOLING YOU."**

**- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

inevitable that two individuals, who have their own needs, will at times find themselves in such conflict that they suddenly appear alien to one another. The intimacy within theatrical collaborations is similar to any other intimate relationship. We long for collaborators who inherently strive for the same aesthetics we hold dear. But just as easily, we ask our collaborators—as we ask our lovers—to submit to some narrative we want to prescribe to them. It's a dictatorial form of possessiveness that's born out of desire, whose end isn't partnership or acceptance, but rather validation which has little to do with the other person.

**TS: And Sarah's relationship to her son—Maurice—what do you make of that? Do you see that relationship as a matter of parents acting like children and children acting as if they were parents – or something different?**

**MVS:** You know, I think there's an element of that in there, certainly. Artists require so much freedom that responsibility can seem like it somehow fetters one's access to truth. Add to that a large dose of personal ambition and one might judge the parent as being self-absorbed, necessitating the reversal of roles as you suggest. But I think Maurice appreciated how much of a trailblazer his mother was. He grew up in the shadow of her celebrity and the wake of her scandals, but they loved one another dearly. Sarah cherished him in a way that she'd been deprived by her own mother. Amidst the rise and fall of fame and finances, he was one of the only constants in her life.

**TS: What about Sarah Bernhardt and her desire to play the title role in *Hamlet* long before it was fashionable to feature gender bending casting in plays—what is your take on that?**

**MVS:** Bernhardt's decision was both practical and political. Then, as unfortunately now, there was a lack of complex, leading roles for woman of a certain age. That meant that just as one was at the top of one's game, there were fewer opportunities. So why shouldn't the greatest actress of her day play the greatest role in history? We long to witness true virtuosity, yet so often our greatest performers are sidelined. Frankly, I don't understand the resistance to female-centered productions unless you genuinely believe they are somehow inherently less substantial, simply because it's a woman in the spotlight rather than a man. But if you do, there are some hard questions you should ask yourself. I would also say that untraditional casting has the potential to shake up what we think we know about classic plays.

**TS: Can you talk about choosing and collaborating with your design team? How will the play manifest itself visually?**

**MVS:** My design team has been absolutely fantastic. First of all, you don't have to say much beyond "1890s Paris" to capture their attention! I mean, we could have done the play "out of period" and modernized it, but I think the themes are so readily parallel to contemporary life, that we didn't feel we needed to underline those ideas visually. And yet, we didn't want to feel obliged to replicate historical, theatrical practices too rigidly, as they often emphasized overly baroque performance and artificially ornate decor (Bernhardt's actual production of *Hamlet* was criticized for its length, partly as a result of its 14 interminably slow scene

changes). Instead, we wanted to capture the period, with an homage to the aesthetic of existentialism that we recognize in contemporary interpretations of *Hamlet*. The question was how do we visualize bringing a piece of theatre from seemingly nothing into being? How do we create a space, and music, and dynamic lighting, that frames the performers in bringing the passion, humor, and ambition of the theatre to bear? It becomes a fun design challenge.

**TS: What else are you working on? Any advice for a young person who wants direct for the theatre?**

**MVS:** Immediately following *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, I'll be working on *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa Fasthorse at Playwrights Horizons. It's a satire about four "woke" white people trying their best to write a Thanksgiving pageant without having Native American representation in the room, and of course they implode. It's the kind of play that derives its humor out of human failing, even if the characters are well-meaning. I find myself really tickled by that sort of thing, because we spend so much time in social settings and online curating our self-image, but when we betray our masks, we reveal something more truthful about who we are. Maybe it's because I've always felt others were better about fronting their masks than I was, but I have a lot of curiosity about that relationship between mask and self. Actually, that speaks to what I might tell young artists. Pursue the thing you're curious about, rather than the thing you're certain of, and you'll engage a process of discovery. Anything that's already self-evident will condescend to an audience and fail to reveal anything to you. •



Moritz von Stuelpnagel in rehearsal for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*



# SARAH'S SUPPORTING PLAYERS



**MANY OF THE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS IN *BERNHARDT/HAMLET* ARE BASED ON REAL PEOPLE WHO WERE RESPECTED ARTISTS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. HERE IS A BRIEF “WHO’S WHO” OF BERNHARDT’S BELOVED FRIENDS AND COLLABORATORS.**

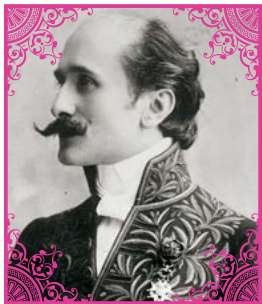
## **BENOÎT-CONSTANT COQUELIN (1841-1909)**



Photo: HdL85

One of the most notable French actors of the 19th century. At just 19, he made his debut at the Comédie-Française and became a company member four years later. He was most lauded for his comedic roles but also succeeded in playing schoolmasters and romantic lovers. While director of the theatre of Porte-Saint-Martin, Coquelin originated the title role in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Then, approaching 60, he toured America with Sarah Bernhardt and, upon their return, co-starred with her in Rostand’s *L’Aiglon* (1900).

## **EDMOND ROSTAND (1868-1918)**



French playwright of the Romantic period, producing some of the final Romantic strains before the outbreak of World War I. Rostand’s first play, *Les Romanesques* (1894) introduced him to the world—and would later be adapted into the musical *The Fantasticks*—and his second, *La Princesse Lointaine* (1895), featured Bernhardt. His most enduring work by far is *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which made its premiere at the theatre of Porte-Saint-Martin in Paris in 1897, starring Coquelin in the title role. *Cyrano* revolves around the protagonist’s concerns that no woman will ever love him because of his abnormally large nose.

## **ALPHONSE MARIA MUCHA (1860-1939)**



Czech painter, lithographer, and founder of the Art Nouveau movement. After singing his way through school in Moravia and painting theatrical scenery in Vienna, Mucha was sponsored to attend the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. Mucha then moved to Paris and volunteered at a local print shop to complete a lithograph poster (in just two weeks!) for an upcoming production of Sardou’s *Gismonda* (1894), starring the legendary Bernhardt. The poster was a runaway success, and Bernhardt contracted Mucha for the next six years. This commercial work, which typically featured beautiful women with halos of hair and flower crowns, introduced the world to the “Mucha style” that would come to be known as Art Nouveau.

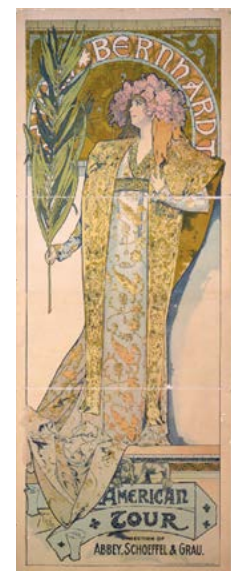
## **MAURICE BERNHARDT (1864-1928)**

Bernhardt’s only child, born in 1864 before the actress’s career took off. At the time of Bernhardt’s *Hamlet*, Maurice would have been 34 years old. Maurice, always fiercely loyal to his mother, married, became a father of two, then was widowed. He later remarried and took to gambling. In 1923, Sarah Bernhardt died in Maurice’s arms. He would outlive his mother by only five years, but in that time he succeeded in enforcing his right to the lease of the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt.



## **ROSEMONDE GÉRARD (1866-1953)**

Wife of Edmond Rostand and a playwright and poet herself. She is best known for her famous couplet, “For you see, each day I love you more. Today more than yesterday and less than tomorrow.” When her son, Maurice Rostand, was born in 1891, Sarah Bernhardt was the first woman invited to see him. Together, Gérard and her son Maurice collaborated on a play of fairy tales, *Un bon petit diable* (1912), inspired from the stories Gérard told him as a child. As Bernhardt lay dying, Gérard and Maurice Rostand were among the last admitted to her bedchamber.



Mucha created this poster for Bernhardt’s 1896 American tour.



# THE WOMAN'S PART: GENDER AND CASTING IN SHAKESPEARE



Janet McTeer as Petruchio in the 2016 Shakespeare in the Park production of *The Taming of the Shrew*

## THE PROBLEM, AND THE IMPACT

During Shakespeare's lifetime (1564-1616) women were not allowed to appear onstage. Female characters were played by boys, usually young teenagers. Eighty-four percent of Shakespeare's characters are male, likely because of his own cultural biases and the practical difficulty of finding young boys skilled enough to take on the roles of adult women.

Shakespeare is so widely produced today that his lack of female characters skews overall data on the availability of roles for women in American and British theatre. It also continues to normalize the lack of representation of women on stage and in film and television today: men received twice the screen time and twice the lines of women in the top-grossing films of 2014 and 2015.

## "UNSEX ME HERE": A LACK OF GOOD ROLES

Women have appeared in Shakespeare's plays since 1660, when an actress played Desdemona in a production of *Othello* in London. While Shakespeare's heroines are sought-after roles, even the best female characters don't offer the depth or challenge of his male protagonists. Rosalind in *As You Like It* speaks the most lines of any woman in Shakespeare, around 700. *Hamlet* varies slightly depending on the version of the text being used, but he generally has close to 1500 lines.

It's easy to see the appeal of *Hamlet* for an actress of Sarah Bernhardt's age and temperament. Bernhardt's reasoning for taking on the role turned Elizabethan logic, which demanded that boys play women, inside out. As Rebeck's Sarah argues, "a boy of twenty cannot understand the philosophy of *Hamlet*." He "does not look the boy, nor has he the ready adaptability of the woman, who can combine the light carriage of youth with...mature thought." Bernhardt's critics disagreed, arguing that women were incapable of understanding a man's thoughts and actions. On June 17, 1899, the *Athenaeum* declared: "A woman is positively no more capable of beating out the music of *Hamlet* than is a man of expressing the plaintive and half-accomplished surrender of Ophelia."

## TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY INTERPRETATIONS

Shakespeare's characters, like all Elizabethan men and women, are bound to fulfill the roles assigned to them by gender and class. But gender is an ongoing discussion in his plays: what does it mean to be masculine? To be feminine? To challenge stereotypes? To disguise yourself as a boy? Many scholars believe that, even during Shakespeare's time, seeing male actors play women heightened these questions for Elizabethan audiences. Contemporary directors are now pointedly using cross-gender casting to provoke questions of power within and around the plays.

British director Phyllida Lloyd recently helmed four all-female productions of Shakespeare plays: *The Taming of the Shrew* (with Janet McTeer as Petruchio), *Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV*, and *The Tempest*. Lloyd described her initial impulse in an interview, "It really began as jobs for the girls, unashamedly." She continued, "I did not want my niece going to see any more classical plays thinking, 'Oh, I'm the one in the corner, sort of mooning over the leading man.' I wanted to feel that she could go to the theater and think, 'My god, I could be in charge.'"

# SHAKESPEARE IN ADAPTATION AND TRANSLATION

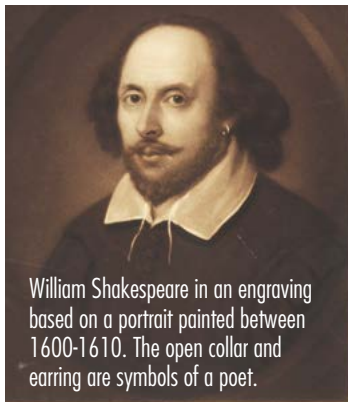


In *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, actress Sarah Bernhardt struggles to remember and make sense of Hamlet's 1500 lines. She commissions playwright Edmond Rostand to rewrite *Hamlet*, asking him to take the plot of Shakespeare's famous play and create a faster and more direct version. As Rostand says, "It is *Hamlet* without the poetry."

## HOW SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE WORKS

Shakespeare didn't invent the stories of his plays: he borrowed them from books, English history, and current events.

*Hamlet* is based on a Norse legend called *Amleth*, written in Latin in a book called *History of the Danes*. Shakespeare's unique contribution to the theatre isn't plot; it's how he uses language to create character and tell the story.



William Shakespeare in an engraving based on a portrait painted between 1600-1610. The open collar and earring are symbols of a poet.

Shakespeare's plays, written between 1590 and 1612, were created for a theatre very different from modern-day Broadway and very different from Bernhardt's theatre in Paris in 1897. His works were originally performed during the day in a round theatre, open to the sky, for 3,000 audience members who filled the building, many standing around the stage. Audiences ate, drank, cheered, and booed. Actors were costumed, but few set pieces were used.

Audiences were accustomed to getting information aurally (through listening) rather than through seeing images or constantly reading. Shakespeare's characters often "paint a picture" of the scene with their words, as Horatio does when he says "**the dead vast and middle of the night.**" Additionally, the poetry of Shakespeare—the rhythm and the sound of the words—reinforces the meaning of the lines and helps the audience understand what's happening.

When Hamlet says, "**To be or not to be—that is the question,**" for example, the short syllables and staccato consonants indicate that Hamlet is thinking quickly, trying to make sense of something. The words **be**, **not**, and **be** are the first stressed syllables; even if an audience member isn't paying close attention, or there's noise around him, he catches the most important words.

## TRANSLATION

Shakespeare's plays are popular around the globe: in the past 60 years there have been productions of *Hamlet* in more than 75 languages, including Klingon, a language invented for the television series *Star Trek*. A literary translation of Shakespeare is an attempt to put Shakespeare's text fully into another language, maintaining all of the characters, settings, and dramatic moments of the original. Translators may choose slightly different words in the language in order to preserve the sense of the line, as we see in this German translation:



A word-by-word rendering of the German reveals that the translator chose to use *Thränen*, the word for tears, rather than *Tau*, the German word for dew, in order to best convey the meaning of what Hamlet is saying.

Translators likewise seek to preserve the effect of the rhythm in Shakespeare's plays, called *iambic pentameter*, in which each line has ten syllables, and syllables alternate between unstressed and stressed. This presents a challenge when translating into languages that do not have stressed syllables. Korean poetry is based on syllable counts. Hyonu Lee, a professor at Soon Chun Hyang University in South Korea, recently translated *Hamlet*. Lee used a pattern of Korean poetry in which three syllables are followed by four syllables because, like iambic pentameter, it mimics the rhythm of the human heart and breath and takes about the same amount of time to speak. Interestingly, Bernhardt performed her adaptation of *Hamlet* in her native French.

## ADAPTATION

A play is adapted when it's changed to suit a different medium, audience, or cultural context. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *Romeo and Juliet* film, set in contemporary times and featuring a pop music soundtrack, is an adaptation that uses the original text of the play. *West Side Story*, the 1961 stage musical, transfers the plot, but not the language, of *Romeo and Juliet* to an immigrant neighborhood on the Upper West Side in the 1950s. *Kiss Me, Kate* (which will open at Roundabout's Studio 54 on Valentine's Day of 2019) is a 1948 musical adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*; set



**"SHE IS BETTER THAN AN ACTRESS, SHE IS A WOMAN."  
-VICTOR HUGO**



David Garrick as Hamlet, 1754. Garrick was known as the most painted man in England in his day, and pioneered the concept of actor-as-celebrity.

during production of a musical, the main characters are the director and leading lady, a far cry from Shakespeare's Petruchio and Katherine of 15th century Italy. Turning to tragedy, *Ran* is a 1985 Japanese film that merges the plot of *King Lear* with the legend of a Japanese warlord. *Ran* employs both translation and adaptation, changing the language, medium, and context of Shakespeare's play. More recently, Vishal Bhardwaj, an Indian filmmaker, produced *Haidar*, a 2014 Hindi-language adaptation of *Hamlet*. Haidar, a student, returns to his family home in Kashmir during a 1995 insurgency to find his father missing and his mother too friendly with his uncle.

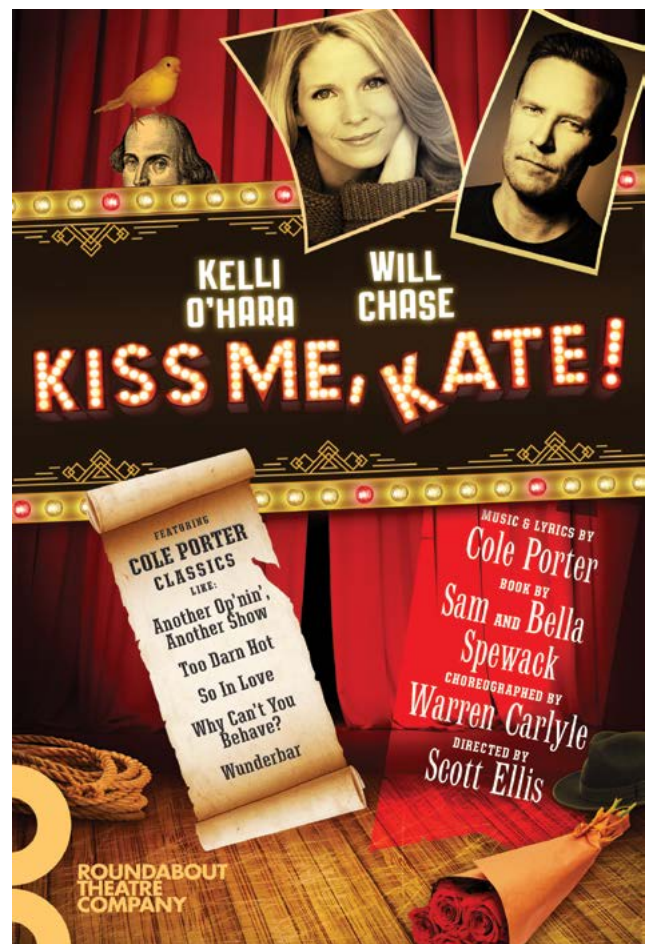
Bernhardt wasn't the first to produce an adaptation of *Hamlet*, nor was she last. Producers and actors have often altered Shakespeare's text to fit their visions and the needs of their audiences. In 1772, the famous actor and producer David Garrick adapted *Hamlet* to make the play more palatable to his audiences and critics. He shortened Hamlet's speeches, restored parts of the play that had been omitted in previous productions, and cut the gravediggers' scene and much of the fifth act, radically altering the play's ending. In the 19th century, producers went even further with

alterations of Shakespeare, performing a happily-ever-after version of *King Lear* in which Lear lives and Cordelia takes the throne with her soon-to-be husband, Edgar.

### TRANSLATION OR ADAPTATION?

In 2016, Oregon Shakespeare Festival commissioned 36 playwrights to "translate" each line of Shakespeare's plays into contemporary English, without altering the story, characters, or setting. The language Shakespeare wrote in is called Early Modern English, and English has evolved continuously since his time. Modern audiences often aren't familiar with Shakespeare's vocabulary, and allusions to 16th-century culture—things like falconry, fencing, or Greek myth—mean nothing to contemporary theatregoers. The line-by-line nature of this translation project puts the focus on making the play understood by audiences. •

Learn more about OSF's Translating Shakespeare Project [HERE](#)



Show art for Roundabout's upcoming production of *Kiss Me, Kate*



# DESIGNER STATEMENTS



Set model designs for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*

## BEOWULF BORITT—SET DESIGN

I knew Sarah Bernhardt's name, of course. But I'm embarrassed to admit I didn't know much more than that she was a very famous, turn-of-the-20th-century actor. I learned more as I started to research this project. I felt like the set had to hint at some of the breadth and excess of her life. At the same time, she is reported to have been a sublime actress. As the play says, an actor's fame is written on water, and we can only take her contemporaries' word that she was a genius actor. In designing the set, I was trying to encompass these two parts of who she was.

Moritz von Stuelpnagel, the director, and I discussed how an actor speaking a playwright's words has the power to create an entire world out of thin air. That is the soul of live theatre. We discussed creating a nearly empty black void for the rehearsal scenes where we see Janet McTeer as Sarah speaking parts of *Hamlet*, creating the world of *Hamlet* with just words. And we wanted to contrast that with her dressing room, her inner sanctum, which displays the excess and opulence of her life.

We tried many ideas but finally settled on a skeletal world that implies the spaces where the story plays out: Sarah's theatre, her dressing room, the streets of Paris, and Edmond Rostand's study. It has enough realism to tell us where we are but also is open and ephemeral enough to fade away into darkness and let us just hear the words. Late in the show we have a brief moment where we see a scene from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and that's the one place we are trying to represent late 19th-century stagecraft in all its opulence and glory.

## TONI-LESLIE JAMES—COSTUME DESIGN

I approached the design of *Bernhardt/Hamlet* acutely aware of the challenge presented in creating the physical embodiment of the great Sarah Bernhardt as portrayed, in my opinion, by the equally gifted Janet McTeer. I was excited for the opportunity to design late 19th-century costumes in their various environments: rehearsal, studio, and in performance

on stage. The heightened costumes of the 19th-century stage are beautiful, over scale, and somewhat comical to the contemporary eye, which made the design assignment particularly appealing to me. I try to look past the characters of Madame Sarah, Rostand and Constant as historical icons of the theatre and seek to convey the human spirit, to be able to fully communicate the life condition of all the characters through the costumes on the stage. My process begins like every designer—with a great deal of costume research and numerous conversations regarding the vision of the production with the director. I find fabric sourcing the most enjoyable aspect of costume design. The men's suit fabric of the period is heavy, 15 ounces, and contributes to the beauty of the tailoring in their ability to hold their shape. I was thrilled to find these from a men's suiting manufacturer in London. The lace for women's costumes had period-specific patterns in their design, and I found the most amazing laces from a lace manufacturer in Latvia who specializes in making lace for lingerie. Being able to create with fabrics as close to the original 19th-century fabrics as possible was very satisfying.

## BRADLEY KING—LIGHTING DESIGN

When Moritz von Stuelpnagel and I first sat down to discuss the designs for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, a dreaded theatrical term arose—"magic realism." This term arises in all sorts of contexts and discussions, usually in graduate school, and hardly anyone can agree on what exactly "magic realism" means. But in our context, the definition became clear: the ability of the light in *Bernhardt/Hamlet* to remain firmly rooted in a naturalistic reality while still allowing for moments of heightened gestures. This could mean a moonlight that's just a touch bluer than normal, a slightly over-dramatic shaft of backlight in an otherwise empty space, or the ability to play with color and angle in ways that lend tension, romance, and passion to scenes that might not be strictly believable in real life. As I write these words, the beginning of technical rehearsals, which is when I truly begin my job in earnest, is almost two months away. We have met, discussed, and poured over Beowulf's model, discussing our initial thoughts

"SOMETHING SEEMED TO BURN WITHIN HER LIKE A CONSUMING FLAME."

- GEORGE TYLER, THEATRICAL PRODUCER

about each scene and how they might play, but all our talk of lighting exists only in our minds. A comfort with the unknown, with the ability to be surprised in the room, truly must be one of a lighting designer's greatest strengths. Will any of these initial thoughts make it onto the stage? I cannot wait to find out!

### FITZ PATTON—SOUND DESIGN AND ORIGINAL MUSIC

The musical world of *Bernhardt/Hamlet* is synonymous with the world of the orchestra. Which, of course, brings a host of concerns and complexities, as well as rich aural opportunities. The expressive range of the orchestra, its mass and its power, has become a repository for lives lived on an epic scale. The orchestra presents a world that is aurally and visually massive and dimensional. Given that Theresa Rebeck's play features an intersection of four extraordinary individuals—Sarah Bernhardt, Edmond Rostand, Shakespeare, and the title character in *Hamlet*—the orchestra suggested to me the power, ambition, tenderness, and courage exemplified by these artists and their work. This was a thrilling discovery because I've long wished to return to the orchestra for inspiration. Plays pass through the lives of designers, giving us the opportunity to touch upon aspects of our creative selves in ways that are unique. *Bernhardt/Hamlet* opened my heart and gave me an instant thrill because it asked me to engage with art and life as boldly and ambitiously as the characters who fill its pages do. If we tell the story well, perhaps you too will look at life from the massive landscape of your exuberant heart. I hope you enjoy the ride. •



Costume design renderings for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*



# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR  
EDUCATORS



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## HOW DOES AN ACTOR PROMOTE THEMSELF IN ORDER TO RAISE THEIR STATUS?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7)

Sarah Bernhardt, the main character in *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, was one of the most famous actors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bernhardt, like many celebrities today, consciously marketed her image to the public. This activity asks students to consider Bernhardt's marketing tactics and how they might update her approach for an Instagram world.

**DISCUSS** Read *The Life, Legends, and Legacy of Sarah Bernhardt*, found on pages 6-7 of this UPSTAGE guide. Discuss Bernhardt's marketing tactics as a class: How did she become famous? What did she do to promote her fame and enhance her career? Which modern celebrities does she call to mind?

**STRATEGIZE** Using the Sarah Bernhardt Marketing Plan template (found [HERE](#)), have students create Instagram marketing plans for the actress. If desired, the class may create an actual Sarah Bernhardt Instagram account and, using images of Bernhardt found in Library of Congress database, create posts for the account.

**SHARE** Have students present their marketing plans, as if they were pitching to Bernhardt herself. Students should explain what demographic they recommend she target, share sample posts and hashtags, and share recommended partners. Encourage students to practice good public speaking skills.

**REFLECT** What has changed in marketing since Bernhardt's day? What remains the same? Is it possible to be a successful artist today without marketing yourself? Why or why not?

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## HOW DOES A THEATRE ENSEMBLE COLLABORATE TO REHEARSE A SCENE?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B)

*Bernhardt/Hamlet* features several scenes of Sarah Bernhardt and the cast of her production of *Hamlet* in rehearsal. This activity offers students the opportunity to rehearse a scene from *Hamlet* in the style of 19th-century actors, digging into both Shakespeare's text and the collaborative dynamic of the rehearsal room.

**TABLE READ** Place students in groups of three, and give each group:

- Job Descriptions for each group - 2 Actors, 1 Costume Designer (found [HERE](#))
- 3 copies of the *Hamlet* Act 1, Scene 5 excerpt (found [HERE](#))
- 2 copies of the figure template (found [HERE](#))

State that during the 19th century, actors worked together to stage plays because the role of the director had not yet been created, and that for this activity students will be working in the style of 19th-century actors like Sarah Bernhardt. Have each group read the scene out loud and discuss: Are there any passages that we don't understand? Any words? What happens in this scene? What is important for the audience to understand from this scene? What might the costumes look like?

**REHEARSE/ DESIGN** Working in pairs, have the actors stage the scene as if on a proscenium. How can the staging help the audience to understand what's happening? Simultaneously, ask the designer to use the figure templates to create costume designs for both Hamlet and the Ghost.

**SHARE AND REFLECT** Have each group perform their interpretation of the scene, with the costume designer sharing their designs prior to the performance. Discuss the process with the class: How was staging and designing the scene without a director different from working with a director? How did you collaborate to make decisions?





# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

## HOW DOES A DIRECTOR USE CASTING CHOICES TO EXPRESS THEIR INTERPRETATION OF *HAMLET*?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9)

*Bernhardt/Hamlet* raises questions about the impact of casting. When casting a play, the director considers her/his interpretation of the script and how casting decisions can support that vision. This activity tasks students with articulating their own vision for Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and then casting the major roles in service of that vision.

- DISCUSS** Read the cast list and cast bios for *Bernhardt/Hamlet*. Discuss what each actor brought to the role and how that contributed to the overall experience of the show. Read the interview with *Bernhardt/Hamlet*’s director Moritz von Stuelpnagel on pages 12-13. Discuss the cast in relation to what he intended to do with this production.
- WRITE** Provide time for students to craft a Director’s Statement that reveals their individual interpretation of the play *Hamlet*. (If your class is studying a different play, they may write a Director’s Statement for any work of your choice.) Encourage them to express a unified vision that includes answers to these questions:
  - What is most interesting to you about this play? What questions will your production explore? What themes will it highlight?
  - Why is a production of this play relevant to audiences to now?
  - How do you envision the world of the play? Set? Costume? Light? Sound? How will these design choices support your theme?
- COLLABORATE** Assign small groups and have one student share their Director’s Statement, then ask the group to brainstorm actors the director could cast to best execute their vision (determine the parameter: classmates, community, celebrities, etc.)
- SHARE & REFLECT** Ask each student to finalize their Director’s Statement and cast list. Then have a few share their work with the class, articulating how each casting choice supports their vision. Ask them what this process revealed about the role of a director and how casting connects to the director’s vision.

## HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT USE BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION TO EXPLORE CONTEMPORARY THEMES?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4)

Theresa Rebeck conducted research on the people, events, and era to inform her play. *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, a work of historical fiction, reflects the artistic choices Rebeck made, inspired by that research. This activity explores how a playwright makes choices based on historical fact in order to create a work of fiction that highlights current themes that are important to them.

- REVIEW** Read the biographies of the historical figures fictionalized in *Bernhardt/Hamlet* and the interview with Theresa Rebeck on pages 4-5 of this UPSTAGE Guide. Discuss the ways the playwright used and manipulated the biographies and events. Ask students to consider why the playwright made these choices. What do they reveal about the play’s themes?
- RESEARCH** Have students gather biographical details about a contemporary celebrity who, like Sarah Bernhardt, is known for their work as well as the public details of their life, for example Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Bette Midler, Selena Gomez, Laverne Cox, Kim Kardashian, Kylie Jenner, Kanye West, or another celebrity of their choice.
- WRITE** Brainstorm the themes presented in *Bernhardt/Hamlet*. Ask students to choose one or to craft their own thematic statement on a topic about which they have strong beliefs. Then, using the biographical details of their chosen celebrity, have students write a scene that shows their celebrity in the process of creating art or an act of self-promotion. Encourage students to make choices about the biographical details and dialogue with the other character in the scene that convey their theme.
- SHARE AND REFLECT** Have students perform scenes. Then ask the audience what they believe the playwright’s thematic message is and what artistic choices convey that message. Encourage playwrights to listen to feedback first and then articulate what theme they hoped to communicate and the artistic choices they made.

# GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES



## NUANCE:

A subtle variation  
*In playing Hamlet, Sarah believes it is less important to perform his masculinity than to show the nuance of his heart.*

## CANONIZE:

To treat as illustrious, preeminent, or sacred, often after death  
*Hamlet speaks of his deceased father's canonized bones, implying that the church sanctioned and honored the dead king.*

## IAMB:

In iambic pentameter, a "foot" consisting of one unstressed syllable and one unstressed syllable  
*Constant explains how he pays attention to the iambs when speaking Shakespeare.*

## PROMONTORY:

A high point of land that protrudes out into a body of water  
*Hamlet refers to the earth as being a sterile promontory, expressing his melancholy.*

## QUINTESSENCE:

The most essential and elemental aspect of something  
*Ruminating on humanity, a depressed Hamlet concludes we are simply the quintessence of dust.*

## ANNIHILATED:

Completely obliterated or destroyed  
*Edmond says that Sarah annihilated his plays.*

## AUGURY:

An omen that tells of what will happen in the future  
*Hamlet says he defies augury; that is, he does not believe in superstition.*

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# ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

## ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO) celebrates the power of theatre by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present, and educating minds for the future. A not-for-profit company founded in 1965, Roundabout fulfills its mission each season through the production of familiar and lesser-known plays and musicals with the ability to take artistic risk as only a not-for-profit can while discovering talented playwrights and providing them long-term artistic support to contribute to the future of the theatrical canon. Roundabout presents this work on its five stages and across the country through national tours. Roundabout has been recognized with 36 Tonys®, 51 Drama Desks, 5 Olivier Awards, 62 Outer Critics Circle, 12 Obie and 18 Lucille Lortel Awards. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org).

## 2018-2019 SEASON



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER PARRA, STAFF ACCOUNTANT

**Ted Sod:** Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the Finance department's Staff Accountant?

**Alexander Parra:** I was born and raised in Gardnerville, NV. Growing up, I was always interested in the arts and tried to get as involved as possible with music and theatre. After high school, I moved to San Diego and began studying accounting at the University of San Diego. Little by little, I became less involved in the arts during undergrad, until I visited New York City in my senior year. While visiting NYC, I saw three Broadway shows (*Rent*, *Wicked*, and *Avenue Q*), and my passion for theatre was instantly renewed; I knew I wanted to contribute to the theatre industry. When I got back to San Diego, I started interning for Broadway/San Diego and moved to NYC as soon as I finished grad school. I began interning at a general management and producing office followed by working in management and booking for Broadway and off-Broadway tours. I started doing accounting for Broadway productions and theatres seven years ago, and about four years ago, I was fortunate enough to start working at Roundabout Theatre Company.

**TS:** Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

**AP:** As the Staff Accountant, I help record, report, and ensure the accuracy of cash flow at RTC. Some of the key roles and responsibilities I help with include: maintaining the general ledger, accounts

receivable, accounts payable, financial reporting, and maintaining financial controls.

**TS:** What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

**AP:** I've always been a numbers person, so being able to do what I love while working in an industry I love is amazing. As the Staff Accountant, I enjoy not knowing what questions might come my way, and I get to spend a lot of time figuring out the best answers to those questions. I also really like being able to interact with each department and people/vendors outside of the company. The hardest part of my job is juggling all the questions and diverse needs that come our way. Because we get to work with so many people inside and outside the company, it's important to try to get everyone what they need in a timely manner while ensuring the information they are receiving is accurate.

**TS:** Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

**AP:** I love the culture and feel of working in theatre, and being part of the Finance department at Roundabout, I know I am part of a supportive team with a common goal. I also love being a part of a company that is able to reach out to the community. Growing up in a small town, I wish I had the opportunity to get the education and hands-on experience that RTC is able to offer. •

Learn more at [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org). Find us on:





# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS



## TICKET POLICY

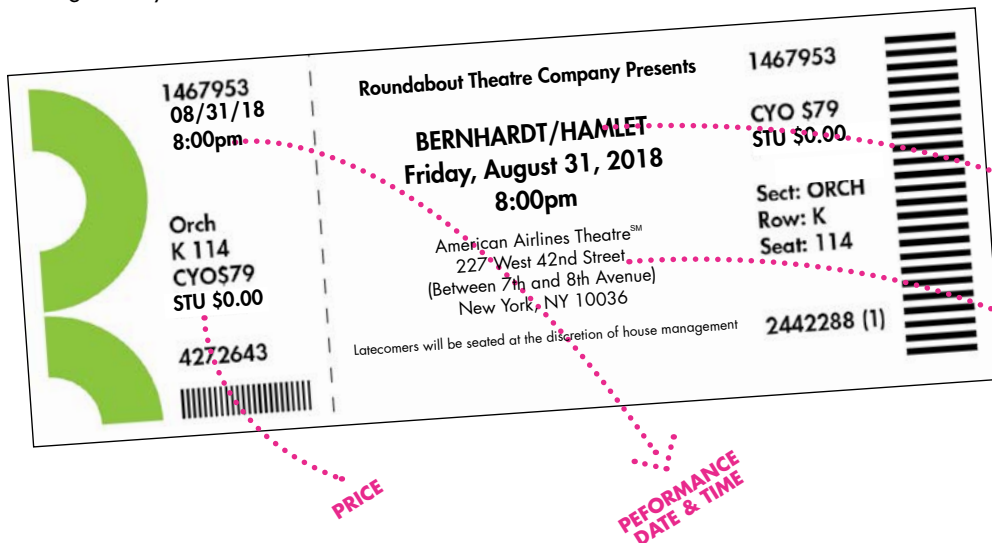
As a student, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row, and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

## PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

## AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the restroom for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



PRICE

PERFORMANCE DATE & TIME

SHOW TITLE  
THEATRE NAME & LOCATION

## A Roundabout Commission

Roundabout's work with new and emerging playwrights and directors, as well as development of new work, is made possible by Kathryn Patterson and Tom Kempner.

We gratefully acknowledge the Roundabout Leaders for New Works: Alec Baldwin, James Costa and John Archibald, Linda L. D'Onofrio, Peggy and Mark Ellis, Howard Gilman Foundation, Jodi Glucksman, Sylvia Golden, Judith and Douglas Krupp, K. Myers, Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater, Ira Pittelman, Laura S. Rodgers, Seedlings Foundation, Mary Solomon, Lauren and Danny Stein, Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, and The Tow Foundation.

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