

UC SANTA BARBARA

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What Dreams May Come

Chances are you've seen "Hamlet," either on the stage or in one of its nearly 120 adaptations in film and television. You think of Yorick's skull and the monologue of existential agony.

[Irwin Appel](#) knows this. That's why the professor and chair of [theater and dance](#) at UC Santa Barbara wants you to see "[Hamlet](#)" as though it's the first time, starting Friday, Oct. 5, and running weekends through Sunday, Oct. 14, in the campus's Studio Theater. Shakespeare's immortal work is the latest production of the university's Naked Shakes, a theater company that specializes in breathing new life into the Bard's works.

"What Naked Shakes tries to do is recapture the essence of hearing a Shakespeare play for the first time," said Appel, the company's artistic director. "It doesn't try to recreate Shakespeare like it's in a museum. It tries to make you feel like when you hear 'To be or not to be, that is the question,' you're almost feeling what was it like for Shakespeare's audience the very first time they heard it."

One of the hallmarks of Naked Shakes' productions is a kind of blind casting. Whoever would do the best in a particular role gets the job, and "Hamlet" is no different. The title role is played by Tadjia Enos, a senior bachelor of fine arts student. Polonius, the father of Ophelia and Laertes, is performed by Roz Cornejo, while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are portrayed by Blake Thompson and Sophie Swezey, respectively.

Casting women in men's roles is no gimmick, Appel said, noting casts in Shakespeare's time all consisted of men. Nor is he trying to make a statement. Actors are chosen to do one thing: act.

"I started as an actor," he said. "I love actors and I also know that actors don't like to put themselves in a box. And I feel that actors are like chameleons. The job description of an actor is to step into the shoes of another individual. No one ever said you have to be the right size, shape, type, gender. In other words, an actor is an actor by definition; you're playing someone else."

Appel, who has adapted nearly all Shakespeare's works, faced a daunting challenge in trimming "Hamlet" — which runs more than four hours uncut — to less than two hours. "I cut it about as far as I could," he said. "I didn't want to cut out important story elements or important characters. I really wanted to preserve the overall structure of the play."

The language — even the pronouns — remains intact. The Prince of Denmark and the other characters are still referred to as "he," Appel said. "So, as a result, the echoes of it are what you make of them. We have not tried to be political about it or draw attention to it."

Besides, he said, even though they're performing one of the most important and beloved plays of all time, it's still just that: a play. Naked Shakes productions keep it simple, with unobtrusive stagecraft and an emphasis on the words.

"I believe that you take a good actor, a good piece of text, a bare stage and audience, and you can make magic happen," Appel said. "I really believe that. I believe in the art and craft of acting. I see acting as an under-appreciated art form. Everyone thinks they can do it, because when it's good it looks easy. It's supposed to look easy. But it's an incredibly difficult craft."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we

draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.