

# WORDS FROM THE WISE

## IN CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR CHARLES ROY

### **What is the enduring appeal of Hamlet? What do people keep reading it, staging it, studying it 400 years after it was written?**

Hamlet, to its great credit, is a play that poses more questions about the people within it than it answers. The play has within it a certain unknowability of motivation. It's a play where Shakespeare gives you extraordinary people, but it's almost like he gives you unbelievably rich pencil sketches and you have to colour within the lines yourself. And everybody comes up with a Hamlet of a very different complexion. I'm talking about readers and performers alike, anybody who approaches the play. There are similarities that everyone will find, but everyone has to invest themselves in this character in order to deal with and answer the questions that the play and the characters leave unanswered within it.

People can see themselves in Hamlet; it's not that he's a blank slate; it's that he seems to be a mirror of our internal selves. He seems to speak aloud many of the concerns and fears that we ourselves hold dear, but are too afraid to speak. He wonders what it means to be an honest man, and to speak honestly about oneself and one's feelings, and he poses the very real question, "Am I a coward?" Well, who among us, at some point, hasn't had to look at themselves in the mirror and say, "Am I a coward?" And Hamlet does this repeatedly throughout the play. He asks the deep dark questions, the probing questions that we barely even dare to ask ourselves in our weakest moments.

### **What is the focus of Classical Theatre Project's production?**

This production is focused in on the character of Hamlet at the expense of the political intrigues and the machinations of the court and the succession story at work in the play. It's about watching someone fearlessly go through a deeply personal domestic trauma, and struggle to get out on the other side. Our play is about one of the most dysfunctional families in history. Hamlet doesn't seem all that bothered that the lines of succession have brushed him to one side. He's primarily angry that his mother remarried too quickly, that his mother didn't honour his father's memory for long enough. There's something highly relatable about that.

It's about watching a man willingly endure as much as he can -- and he hits a breaking point. He's pretending to be mad, but at a certain point he becomes mad in his own right. It's anxiety induced -- I think many of us under similar conditions would have gone a whole lot madder a whole lot earlier. And that's a very interesting aspect of the play -- where is the breaking point of a human being? What is the breaking point of a soul?

We see a man go through terrific traumas, constantly questions, "Why should I put up with this? Why should I persevere? Why should I carry on?" And ultimately the answer to that, for the purposes of our show, is so that the audience can feel it. Human beings like the safety of observing somebody else go through horrific events from a vantage point that allows us to be empathetic and sympathetic, but not actually directly involved. We need to relive emotional experiences, especially dark ones, and by reliving them temporarily, we get to release them for a little while too.

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**In rehearsal you said that Hamlet is a play about “the death of a great soul.” Could you talk about that idea?**

Part of the enduring legacy of this play is that we get to experience a couple of hours with one of the most extraordinary people we will ever meet. That person is Hamlet. He's smarter than most of us, he's funnier than most of us, he's braver and more charismatic than most of us, he's more insightful than most of us, and depending on how I cast it, he's usually better looking than most of us. [Laughs.] Because this production focuses so acutely on the struggle of this one man, it becomes a struggle about a great young man. We don't simply relate to the emotional traumas that he's experiencing, we now relate to the man and the person we wish we could be. We desperately hope that he'll make it.

But the forces are so large that they swallow him up too. And what's amazing is that he makes it so terrible close to making it out alive. That's what our play is about. The most extraordinary man we've ever met, and we'll watch him suffer the most extraordinary emotional and physical traumas that are imagineable, and we'll pray that he makes it out the other side. There's a suggestion in our play that this is an enduring story, that this man will continuously endure this hardship for us. As long as there are people who will watch Hamlet, there will be a Hamlet who will suffer.

