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**CLASSIC
DRAMA**

William Shakespeare
Hamlet
Prince of Denmark

Performed by **Anton Lesser** and full cast



NA412412D

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2	Act 1 Scene 2, Part 1	7:16
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4	Act 1 Scene 3, Part 1	2:54
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16	Act 2 Scene 2, Part 4	5:57
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32	Act 3 Scene 3, Part 2	2:33
33	Act 3 Scene 3, Part 3	2:27
34	Act 3 Scene 4, Part 1	2:17
35	Act 3 Scene 4, Part 2	2:06
36	Act 3 Scene 4, Part 3	1:45
37	Act 3 Scene 4, Part 4	5:01
38	Act 4 Scene 1	3:42
39	Act 4 Scene 2	1:06
40	Act 4 Scene 3	3:33
41	Act 4 Scene 4, Part 1	1:19
42	Act 4 Scene 4, Part 2	2:24
43	Act 4 Scene 5, Part 1	1:05

44	Act 4 Scene 5, Part 2	4:23
45	Act 4 Scene 5, Part 3	1:57
46	Act 4 Scene 5, Part 4	4:11
47	Act 4 Scene 6	1:34
48	Act 5 Scene 7, Part 1	7:38
49	Act 5 Scene 7, Part 2	1:45
50	Act 5 Scene 7, Part 3	2:05
51	Act 5 Scene 1, Part 1	3:19
52	Act 5 Scene 1, Part 2	5:36
53	Act 5 Scene 1, Part 3	2:04
54	Act 5 Scene 1, Part 4	4:43
55	Act 5 Scene 2, Part 1	3:02
56	Act 5 Scene 2, Part 2	6:02
57	Act 5 Scene 2, Part 3	9:09
58	Act 5 Scene 2, Part 4	4:13

Total time: 3:22:16

William Shakespeare
Hamlet
Prince of Denmark

CAST

Hamlet	Anton Lesser
Claudius	Edward de Souza
Gertrude	Susan Engel
Ophelia	Emma Fielding
Polonius	Peter Jeffrey
Horatio	Sean Baker
Laertes	Jamie Glover
Ghost/Player King	Geoffrey Whitehead
Rosencrantz/1st Gravedigger	Gavin Muir
Guildenstern/2nd Gravedigger	Peter Yapp
Marcellus/Cornelius/Player Queen	Benjamin Soames
Barnardo/Priest/Captain	David Timson
Osric/Francisco/Voltimand	Richard Pearce
Fortinbras/Reynaldo	Paul Panting



Anton Lesser (Hamlet) has played many of the principal Shakespearean roles for the Royal Shakespeare Company, including Petruchio, Romeo and Richard III. His other theatre credits include *Wild Oats* and *Art*. Appearances in major TV drama productions include *The Mill on the Floss* and *The Politician's Wife*. He also reads *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Edward de Souza (Claudius) is one of the country's leading classical actors and has worked many seasons for the RSC, Royal National Theatre and Old Vic. His film credits include *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *The Spy Who Loved Me*. He also reads *Don Quixote*, *The Island Race* and *The New Testament* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Susan Engel (Gertrude) has had a varied and accomplished career in the theatre, performing on many occasions for the Royal Shakespeare Company and Royal National Theatre. Among her West End credits are *An Inspector Calls*, *Three Sisters* and *Hamlet*. On TV she has been seen in *Kavanagh QC* and *Inspector Morse* and her film credits include *Damage* and Peter Brook's *King Lear*.



Emma Fielding (Ophelia) trained at RSAMD. She has worked for the Royal National Theatre in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* and the RSC in *Twelfth Night* and John Ford's *The Broken Heart*, for which she won the Dame Peggy Ashcroft Award for Best Actress. She also appeared in the world première of Craig Raine's *1953*. Emma Fielding has appeared in numerous radio plays and also reads *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Peter Jeffrey (Polonius) has played Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* and Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the Royal Shakespeare Company as well as numerous roles for the Royal National Theatre and the West End. On TV he has appeared in *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Our Friends in the North*, *Middlemarch* and *A Village Affair*.



Sean Baker (Horatio) has worked extensively for the RSC in *Troilus and Cressida*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and *Julius Caesar*, as well as *Galileo* and *The Oresteia* for the Royal National Theatre and other plays across the UK and in the West End.



Jamie Glover (Laertes) trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama and has since played title roles in *Hamlet* and *Henry V* and a number of other roles in, amongst others, *Tartuffe* and *The Rose Tattoo* for Sir Peter Hall. His TV appearances include *A Dance to the Music of Time* and *Cadfael*.



Geoffrey Whitehead (Ghost/Player King) has played leading roles in *Reverger's Tragedy*, *The Seagull* and in *Wild Honey* and *Body Language* for Alan Ayckbourn. His many TV credits include *Z Cars*, *The Sweeney*, *War and Remembrance*, *Crossing the Floor* and *Lord of Misrule*.



Gavin Muir (Rosencrantz/1st Gravedigger) has worked for various theatre companies including the Boulevard Theatre in Paris, and in the West End. His TV credits include the BAFTA-winning *Our Friends in the North* and *Cracker*, and his voice is familiar to listeners of radio drama. He was also a member of the singing group *The Flying Pickets*.



Peter Yapp (Guildenstern/2nd Gravedigger) has appeared in plays and theatres across Britain and in the West End including *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *The Black Prince*. His TV credits include *House of Elliot*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Poirot*. He also appears on Naxos AudioBooks' *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*.



Benjamin Soames (Marcellus/Cornelius/Player Queen) trained at LAMDA. Since then he has appeared in the TV series *Sharpe* and *Absolutely Fabulous* as well as the TV films *Heavy Weather* and *England, My England*. His theatre credits include *Measure For Measure*. He has also recorded *Tales from the Norse Legends*, *Tales from the Greek Legends* and *The Tale of Troy* for Naxos AudioBooks.



David Timson (Barnardo/Priest/Captain) has performed in modern and classic plays across the country and abroad, including *Wild Honey* for Alan Ayckbourn, *Hamlet*, *The Man of Mode* and *The Seagull*. He has been seen on TV in *Nelson's Column* and *Swallows and Amazons*, and in the film *The Russia House*.



Richard Pearce (Osric/Francisco/Voltimand) has extensive experience of radio drama, having been a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company for many years. His theatre credits include *Torch Song Trilogy*, *Conjugal Rites*, *Cider With Rosie* and *The Boyfriend*.



Paul Panting (Fortinbras/Reynaldo) has performed across the UK in plays such as *Double Double*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Boys from Syracuse* and on TV in *Wycliffe*, *The Bill* and *Sean's Show*.

William Shakespeare

Hamlet

Prince of Denmark

Hamlet, which dates from 1600-1601, is the first in Shakespeare's great series of four tragedies, the others being **Othello** (1603), **King Lear** (1605) and **Macbeth** (1606). In writing this extraordinary play Shakespeare effectively reinvented tragedy after an interval of roughly two thousand years – we have to go back to the Greek dramatists of fifth-century Athens to find anything of comparable depth and maturity.

Certainly Shakespeare had already dealt with tragic themes and situations in plays such as **Romeo and Juliet**, **Richard II** and **Julius Caesar**, but in **Hamlet** he found himself able to fuse with complete artistic success the conflicting concerns of the private individual and the public state of which he is a member, or for which he may indeed be responsible – Hamlet is, after all, Prince of Denmark. This is a quintessentially Renaissance theme: it is no longer enough to appeal to an accepted moral or religious system, but instead each man must find out for himself a moral path through the 'unweeded garden' of life.

The Sources of Hamlet

The first known version of the **Hamlet** story is found in the twelfth-century *Historia Danica* by Saxo Grammaticus. Most of the main ingredients of the story are already present, albeit in primitive form, and some of the names, too – 'Amlethus' for Hamlet. In 1576 Francois de Belleforest retold the story in his *Histoires Tragiques*, translated into English in 1608 and hence too late for Shakespeare to have read – but someone, perhaps Thomas Kyd, came across the story in the 1580s and turned it into a play which must have been Shakespeare's immediate source, however radically different Shakespeare's version turned out to be. We know, incidentally, that the idea of a ghost seeking revenge comes from this lost play: Thomas Lodge in 1596 writes of the 'ghost which cried so miserably at The Theater, like an oyster wife, "Hamlet, revenge."'

Synopsis of the play

Act 1, Scene 1: Sentinels at the castle of Elsinore have seen the ghost of 'the king that's dead' – Hamlet's father – walking the ramparts. Horatio, Hamlet's closest friend, then sees it too, and decides to tell the Prince.

Scene 2: The new king, Claudius – Hamlet's uncle – addresses the court. Laertes, son of the king's chief minister Polonius, is given leave to return to France. Hamlet bitterly resents his mother's recent marriage to Claudius and only reluctantly agrees to stay in Denmark rather than return to his studies in Wittenberg. Horatio tells Hamlet about his father's ghost and they agree to watch for it at midnight.

Scene 3: Laertes bids farewell to his sister Ophelia and warns her to take no notice of the advances Hamlet has been making to her. Polonius in turn offers some worldly counsel to Laertes, and then reinforces Laertes' advice to Ophelia.

Scene 4: The ghost beckons Hamlet to follow, which he does.

Scene 5: The ghost tells Hamlet how he was poisoned by Claudius while he slept, and orders his son to avenge the murder.

Act 2, Scene 1: Polonius sets Reynaldo to spy in Paris on Laertes. Ophelia enters in

distress to tell her father that Hamlet has come to her in a disturbed state; Polonius decides that Hamlet must be mad and resolves to tell the king.

Scene 2: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, old friends of Hamlet, are welcomed by the king, who wishes them to spy on Hamlet to discover what is upsetting him. News arrives of a peace with Norway. Polonius informs the king that he believes Hamlet to be mad with unrequited love for his daughter Ophelia. Hamlet greets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern but clearly suspects that they are working for the king. They tell him that a company of actors are about to arrive at Elsinore; Hamlet then welcomes the players and conceives the idea of getting them to put on a play at court which will imitate the events of his father's murder and thus, he hopes, expose Claudius' guilt.

Act 3, Scene 1: The king and Polonius eavesdrop on a conversation between Ophelia and Hamlet in which the former returns to Hamlet all love tokens. Hamlet reacts with angry contempt. Claudius is not convinced either that Hamlet is mad or that he is suffering from unrequited love; Polonius suggests that the Queen should speak privately with her son to try and ascertain the cause of his grief.

Scene 2: The actors perform the play, as instructed by Hamlet, and Claudius reacts with violent horror to what he sees. Polonius asks Hamlet to see his mother in her chamber.

Scene 3: The king decides to send Hamlet to England. Hamlet, on the way to his mother's room, sees Claudius at prayer and is only prevented from killing him by the thought that he might have repented and therefore escape the damnation he deserves.

Scene 4: Polonius, with the Queen's consent, hides behind a curtain to overhear the conversation. Hamlet tells his mother that Claudius is in fact the murderer of her first husband – old Hamlet – and bitterly reproaches her for what he regards as her treacherous and incestuous behaviour in marrying Claudius. Polonius, fearing for the Queen's safety, exclaims aloud, and is stabbed while hiding behind the curtain by Hamlet, who at first believed him to be the king. The ghost reappears to warn Hamlet to treat his mother leniently, but not to forget the duty of vengeance. The Queen is remorseful and promises to help her son.

Act 4, Scene 1: The king confirms Hamlet's instant exile to England.

Scene 2: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fail to discover from Hamlet the whereabouts of

Polonius' body.

Scene 3: Hamlet is dismissed to England by Claudius, who then in soliloquy tells us that Hamlet will be put to death by Denmark's allies.

Scene 4: Hamlet, on his way to exile, sees the Norwegian army on its way to war and envies them their capacity for decisive action.

Scene 5: Ophelia has been driven mad by the death of her father at the hand of her lover. Laertes, returning in rage, blames Claudius.

Scene 6: Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet which tells him that he has escaped and is on his way back to Elsinore.

Scene 7: The king persuades Laertes that Hamlet is his enemy. News arrives of Hamlet's return, and Claudius outlines a treacherous means by which Laertes may avenge his father's death and sister's madness. The Queen then brings more bad news: Ophelia has drowned herself.

Act 5, Scene 1: Hamlet and Horatio come upon two gravediggers at work. They show him the skull of Yorick, the King's jester. Hamlet realises whose grave is being dug when Ophelia's funeral procession comes in sight. Hamlet and Laertes quarrel.

Scene 2: Hamlet tells Horatio the story of his

escape, and of how he has sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths. Osric brings a challenge from Laertes to a fencing bout. Hamlet and Laertes greet each other courteously and the bout begins. Hamlet having scored two hits, Laertes takes the poison-tipped foil and wounds Hamlet, but in the ensuing scuffle the rapiers are exchanged and Laertes, too, is fatally wounded. Meanwhile, the Queen has drunk of the poisoned chalice reserved for Hamlet but names Claudius as the villain before she dies. Hamlet stabs the king and forces him to drink off the rest of the poisoned chalice. Laertes apologises to Hamlet and dies. Hamlet names Fortinbras of Norway, whose arrival is imminent, as his successor, and in turn dies himself.

The above summary of the action conveys little of the searching poetic intensity or profound characterisation of the play, but it does suggest that **Hamlet** is a play rich in varied and exciting action. True though this is, the central enigma of **Hamlet** in fact rests on a question about inaction: why is the protagonist so slow to act on the ghost's clear instruction? To say that Hamlet's fatal flaw (in Aristotelian terms) is 'indecisiveness' solves nothing: why is he so indecisive? The most convincing answer to

this question, I believe, is that Hamlet's capacity for decisive action has been disastrously blunted by the appalling shock to his moral system administered by his mother's swift remarriage: even before Hamlet discovers that his uncle is a murderer, he is in a state of profound depression, his idealised concept of women utterly destroyed by the blind (and incestuous) passion his mother seems to feel for the unworthy Claudius. For Hamlet, the world is like an 'unweeded garden' possessed only by 'things rank and gross in nature'; sexuality is now repulsive rather than beautiful, so that even the innocent Ophelia is corrupted in his eyes – 'frailty, thy name is woman!' Only when Ophelia is dead and when Hamlet has had time to come to terms with mortality – witness the gravediggers' scene – is he able calmly to take the opportunity which providence puts in his way: 'the readiness is all.'

What makes **Hamlet** the memorable play it is, the quintessential tragedy in many people's eyes? First there is the complex, loveable, infuriating character of Hamlet himself; then there is the extraordinarily powerful sense of family and generational conflict around which the play is built, of suffocating emotion clamouring for a

release which is only achieved in the last scene; the play is amazingly rich, too, in variety of tone and language, ranging from the comic (Polonius being made a fool of by Hamlet) to the sinister (Claudius offering silver-tongued friendship to the appalled hero) to the sublime (the great series of soliloquies given to Hamlet). How wonderfully, too, Shakespeare is able to combine the comic with the tragic or profound: the gravediggers jest about death, yet when Hamlet confronts the skull of his old friend Yorick the tone shifts effortlessly into pathos – ‘Alas, poor Yorick!’ – thence to physical disgust – ‘my gorge rises at it’ – and finally into searing cynicism at the treacherous falseness of appearances – ‘Now get you to my lady’s chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come...’ The play’s range, then, is dazzling and immense: our perception of mankind, like Hamlet’s, is compelled to the extremes of admiration and revulsion: ‘What a piece of work is a man... the beauty of the world; and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?’

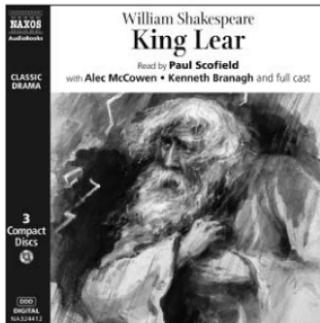
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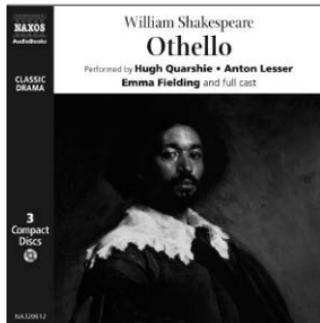
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The New Cambridge Shakespeare

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Hamlet
Prince of Denmark

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Total time
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