

Hamlet: regretfully long

By Janet Moffatt

A LENGTHY performance and comfortable seats in a dark theatre took their toll on this reviewer at Friday night's performance of "Hamlet" at the National Arts Centre.

Were it not for a vigilant friend jostling my elbow, I would have been

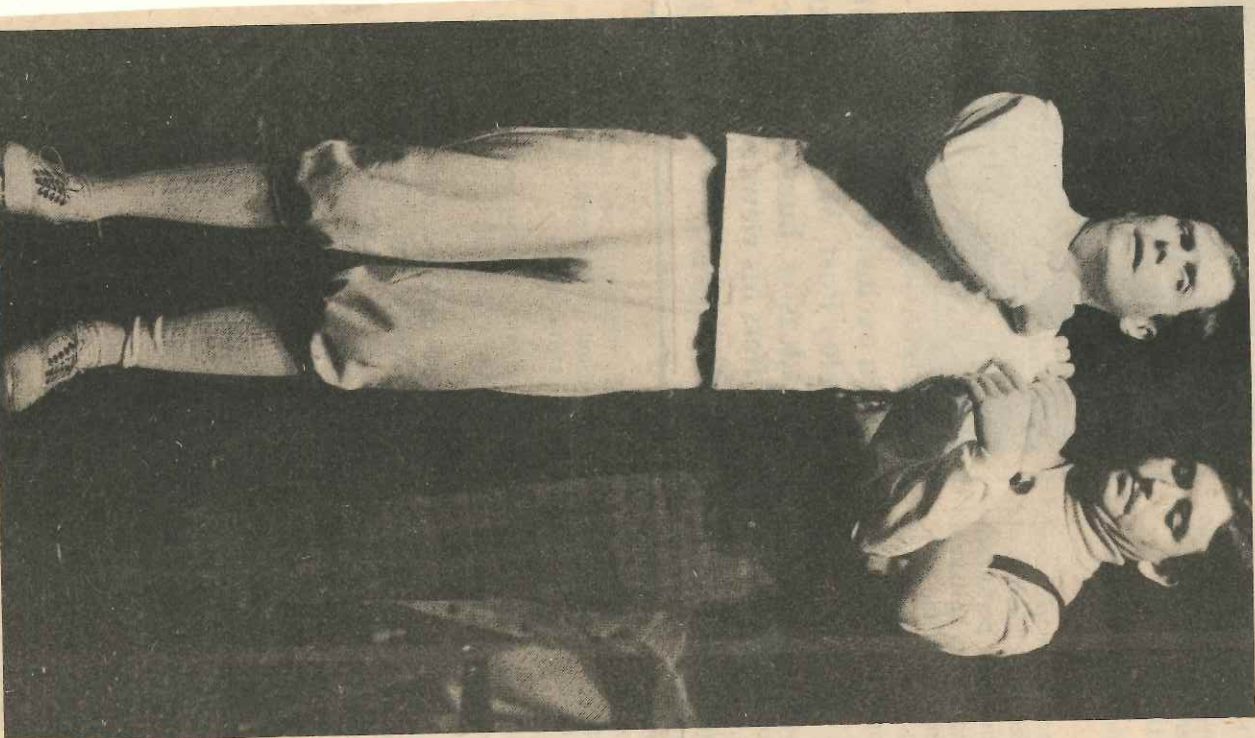


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Brian McKay at Horatio helps Hamlet into his fencing gear.

caught cat-napping through the NAC Theatre Company's four-hour interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy.

I say this not to discourage you from seeing "Hamlet", for there is much to stimulate your interest in this production. But I urge you to have a good night's sleep the night before.

In setting the tale of the Prince of Denmark in the 1930's director John Wood sought a sense of immediacy which a period production might not have. The diplomatic intrigue and sinister decadence of the 17th century Danish court also ring true in this portrayal of Europe in the late thirties.

Since its return from a seven-week North American tour the NAC Company's "Hamlet" is more polished and amusing to watch. Working with a spare set and few props, the cast has managed to brighten even the most static soliloquies with well-timed gestures.

"I have of late, though wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth," Hamlet calls to his college fraternity buddies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as they hang around the gym locker room. Emerging from the shower, the prince towels off, douses his pals with foot powder and springs away to carry out his plan of revenge.

Though audiences may not expect Shakespeare's original "prihees" and "forsooths" in a modern-dress version of his classic, the strangeness of the dialogue disappears after the first few scenes.

As an exercise in proving the universal timelessness of Shakespeare, and in encouraging new insights into a classic, John Wood's "Hamlet" works. Friday night's audience responded warmly and enthusiastically—a good sign for the company, which performs "Hamlet" in repertory with "Equus" every day except Sunday until May 12.