

# HAMLET Opera

## Soundtheater/Opera

Music & Libretto  
by  
Carson Kievman

Based on: "The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark" (Cir. 1600–1601)  
by  
William Shakespeare

Pulsing, provocative and multidimensional, this contemporary take on Shakespeare's classic drama was the final commission by legendary theatrical producer **Joseph Papp** for the **Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival** (1987–91) but never performed due to Papp's passing in 1991 soon after the work's first draft. Premiere of Staged Concert at **SoBe Institute of the Arts** Little Stage Theater, March 2012

*Carson Kievman has created a unique and controversial form of music experience."* **Joseph Papp** (Writing for the New York Post April 18, 1979)

*"I have been familiar with Mr. Kievman's work since 1978, when I produced his brilliantly innovative musical work for the theater, WAKE UP, IT'S TIME TO GO TO BED! I feel that Mr. Kievman ranks among the foremost modern composers in his understanding of both the components of musical composition and in the particular demands of a theatrical music work. Mr. Kievman has the somewhat rare ability to translate the dramatic and emotional contexts of his works to his audience in a powerful and profound way musically. This strong combination of Mr. Kievman's innovative technical abilities as a composer with his powerful emotional and dramatic sense make him an artist very worthy of consideration"* **Joseph Papp** recommendation: (December 22, 1986)

## INTRODUCTION

*"Words, words, words" How perfect they are, how naturally musical, deep, and complicated.*

"I had been thinking about this play since I was a boy – how the words and Hamlet's character transcend even the story. In 1979, Joseph Papp offered me a commission and requested that I apply my "Soundtheater" ideas to *Hamlet*. I did not feel ready to undertake such a project and I declined. Nonetheless, the idea remained with me and in 1987 I accepted the commission and began work. *Hamlet* is partly about death of fathers. Tragically and ironically, during my years of preparing the libretto and working on the score, several important people (father figures) passed away, including Joe Leavitt, Luigi Nono, Olivier Messiaen and my own father, Michael Kievman. And in 1992, Joseph Papp died of cancer. I set the initial draft of this project aside, where it

remained until 2012 when SoBe Arts premiered a staged concert of the work. My intention was to create a *Hamlet* with the highest impact to contemporary audiences and yet to maintain a clear respect for Shakespeare's genius. Therefore this work is exceptional in that it is not a traditional opera nor is it a musical. This *Hamlet* is unpredictable, contradictory, piercing, pulsing, provocative and multidimensional, a contemporary take on Shakespeare's classic drama. The action takes place when a 'medieval carnival' visits Elsinore castle. The sense of Elsinore being on the border (and shore) of Denmark evokes the excitement of mystery and instability caused by the constant questioning of what lies just across the border. Medieval rides spin inside the castle gates. Hamlet confronts his fellow characters on various rides, including a merry-go-round, a house of horrors and a house of mirrors! My intentions were to create Hamlet primarily with actions and gripping music. The words, which are actually sung, are those that simply cannot be told adequately through just physical action (Those words that invoke a philosophical, spiritual, or psychological concept). Interestingly enough, those words tend to be the famous dialogues and major soliloquies. I have attempted to have these vocal sections hold the opera together like pillars. Also dramatic scenes are combined into simultaneous events which only through music can clearly be delineated. For example Ophelia's mad scene (*Valentine's Day*) is combined with Hamlet's fantastical tales of pirate ships and the stealing off Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to have their heads cut off, along with Laertes storming the castle demanding justice for his father's death are presented concurrently. The text is Shakespeare's without any alteration. In general, the opera moves forward through stage action and pure music, which expresses on its own terms ideas which Shakespeare articulated with words." Carson Kievman (1991)

### **Dramatis Personae**

Double parts according to production needs (approx.: 13 minimum)

Claudius, King of Denmark – Hamlet, son to the late, and nephew to the present, King – Polonius, Lord Chamberlain – Horatio, friend to Hamlet – Laertes, son to Polonius – Voltmand – Cornelius – Rosencrantz courtiers – Guildenstern – Osric – A Gentleman – A Priest – Marcellus officers – Barnardo – Francisco, a soldier – Reynaldo, servant to Polonius – Players – Two Clowns, gravediggers – Fortinbras, Prince of Norway – A Norwegian Captain – English Ambassadors – Gertrude, Queen of Denmark, mother to Hamlet – Ophelia, daughter to Polonius – Ghost of Hamlet's father – Lords, Ladies, Officers, Soldiers, – Sailors, Messengers, Attendants

Instrumentation: Flute, 2 Clarinets (dbl Bass Cl.), 2 Trumpets, Horn, 2 Percussion, Keyboard (Samplers & Piano), Strings

### **Vocal Specifications**

Double parts according to production needs (approx.: 13 minimum)

Baritone w/ high falsetto or Dramatic Tenor: Hamlet

Baritone w/falsetto: A Captain, Reynaldo, Cornelius, 3rd Clown, Polonius, Gravedigger

Lyric Baritone: Laertes – 2nd Player (Lucianus)

Bass/Baritone: Claudius, Rosencrantz, Hamlet #2, English Ambassador

Basses: Ghost of Hamlet's father, 1st Player King, A Priest (or Bass/Baritone), Barnardo (or Bass/Baritone), Fortinbras (or Bass/Baritone)

Lyric Tenor: Horatio, Guildenstern, 1st Clown, Osric

Tenors: Marcellus, 3rd Player (Prologue), Messenger, Attendant, Voltmand, A Gentleman, Francisco, 2nd Clown

Dramatic Mezzo: Gertrude, Player Queen

Lyric Soprano: Ophelia

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

a. *Funeral March* (Francisco, Barnardo, Horatio, Marcellus)

### Scene 2

- a. *Merry-Go-Round* (Hamlet, Horatio, Claudius, Gertrude)
- b. *Father Lost A Father* (Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Ensemble)
- c. *Sullied Flesh* (Hamlet, Ensemble)
- d. *Funeral Baked Meats* (Hamlet)

### Scene 3

- a. *Subject To His Birth* (Laertes, Ophelia)
- b. *Reckless Libertine* (Ophelia, Laertes, Polonius)
- c. *To Thine Own Self Be True* (Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia)
- d. *Tender Yourself More Dearly* (Polonius, Ophelia)

### Scene 4

a. *The King Doth Wake Tonight* (Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus)

### Scene 5

a. *Ghost* (Ghost, Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus)

## ACT TWO

### Scene 1

a. *Wild Behavior* (Polonius, Reynaldo, Ophelia)

## Scene 2

- a. *Welcome Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* (Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius)
- b. *Greetings From Norway* (Claudius, Volteward, Gertrude, Polonius, Ensemble)
- c. *Brevity Is The Soul Of Wit* (Polonius, Assistant, Gertrude, Claudius)
- d. *Beautified Ophelia* (Hamlet, Polonius, Horatio)
- e. *Brevity Is The Soul Of Wit (Part II)* (Polonius, Claudius, Assistant)
- f. *Method To His Madness (Maggots In A Dead Dog)* (Hamlet, Polonius)
- g. *King of Infinite Space* (Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Hamlet)
- h. *What A Piece Of Work Is A Man* (Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern)
- i. *Mad North-Northwest* (Hamlet, Guildenstern, Polonius, Rosencrantz, 3rd Player)
- j. *What An Ass Am I* (Hamlet)

## ACT THREE

### Scene 1

- a. *To Be Or Not To Be* (Hamlet, Hamlet # 2)
- b. *Get Thee To A Nunnery* (Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius, Polonius)

### Scene 2

- a. *Speak The Speech* (Hamlet, 1st Player King, Horatio)
- b. *I Eat The Air* (Claudius, Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia)
- c. *Dumb Show* (Instrumental)
- d. *Play Within The Play* (Ophelia, Hamlet, Player 3, 1st Player King, Player Queen, Player 2 (Lucianous), Polonius, Gertrude, Claudius)
- e. *The Recorders* (Hamlet, Horatio, Guildenstern, Rosencrantz)
- f. *Witching Time Of Night* (Hamlet, Polonius, Claudius)

### Scene 3

- a. *Forgive Me, My Foul Murder* (Claudius, Hamlet)

### Scene 4

- a. *X-Rated* (Gertrude, Hamlet, Ghost, Polonius)

## ACT FOUR

### Scene 1

- a. *Mad As The Sea And Wind* (Gertrude, Claudius)

### Scene 2

a. *The King Is A Thing* (Hamlet, Guildenstern, Rosencrantz)

### Scene 3

a. *Politic Worms* (Claudius, Hamlet, Gertrude)

### Scene 4

a. *Go Captain* (Fortinbras, Hamlet, Captain, Rosencrantz)

b. *Occasions* (Hamlet)

### Scene 5

a. *Valentine's Day* (Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Hamlet, Messenger, Laertes, Ensemble)

### Scene 6

a. *Pirates* (Hamlet, Horatio)

### Scene 7

a. *Naked Hamlet* (Claudius, Laertes, Messenger, Hamlet)

## ACT FIVE

### Scene 1

a. *Gravemaking* (Gravemaker, Clown #1, Clown #2, Clown #3, Hamlet, Horatio, Priest, Laertes, Gertrude, Claudius, Ensemble)

### Scene 2

a. *The Readiness Is All* (Hamlet, Horatio, Osric, Lord)

b. *O, Villainy! (Part 1)* (Instrumental)

c. *Hamlet From Himself* (Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius)

d. *O, Villainy! (Part 2)* (Claudius, Laertes, Hamlet, Osric, Gertrude, Horatio, Ensemble)

e. *Good Night Sweet Prince* (Laertes, Hamlet, Horatio, Osric)

f. *Go, Bid The Soldiers Shoot!* (Fortinbras, Ambassador from England, Horatio)

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