

Innovative Hamlet at the Mark Taper Forum & Gatsby Redux at Greystone Mansion & Gardens

By **Shari Barrett** - June 12, 2025



Patrick Ball stars in Hamlet, adapted and directed by Robert O'Hara at the Mark Taper Forum. (Photo credit: Jeff Lorch)

Center Theatre Group is presenting the premiere of a new, Hitchcockian noir take on **Hamlet**, one of the most famous tales ever told, adapted and directed by Robert O'Hara. And it's very apparent from the moment you enter this is not going to be a traditional Shakespearean presentation as the sound of crashing waves greets you with a sign center stage announcing this is an Elsinore Picture. And I loved every innovative moment from start to finish!

What ensues is a very modern interpretation of Shakespeare's classic, starting with Hamlet and Ophelia taking center stage in a passionate encounter. But are these the real actors from the film or the characters they are portraying? In that respect, O'Hara's adaptation offers a very different look at the story and its characters, told in a two-hour format with no intermission. "I'm diving deep into my love of Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, Salvador Dali and Perry Mason to tell this story," O'Hara shares. "I like my Shakespeare tragedies lean, brisk and intense. There will be blood." And he has succeeded brilliantly!

At first, we watch the essence of Hamlet as we know it, beginning with Hamlet asking his best friend Horatio, "So ... once more... tell me about this Ghost." But Ghosts are tricky things, especially in a world of madness, murder, and mayhem. And thanks to the multi-level Set Design by Clint Ramos, emotionally-inspiring Lighting Design by Lap Chi Chu, effectively menacing Projection Design by Yee Eun Nam, and soul-challenging Sound Design and Original Music by Lindsay Jones, we see Hamlet's father's Ghost in a much-larger-than-life, blood-filled and frightening representation, enough to create fear and madness in any who witness it.

But when the traditional story ends, the play moves into an investigation about on-the-set wrongdoings that threaten not only the actors' careers but the Corporate Board of Elsinore Pictures for letting things get out of control. What really went on during "The Night of the Elsinore Massacre" is narrated by detective and corporate Fixer Fortinbras, who brings in various film actors to give evidence by sharing exactly what they witnessed. And each of those testimonies offers laughter and great insights into the real actors portraying Shakespeare's classic characters in the Elsinore Pictures project. And as such, we see drug-induced madness

and amorous liaisons not in the script as a rich entitled Corporate Prince goes on a ferocious rampage that eventually leads to a massacre in the living room.

And in the end, it's up to us to decide if Hamlet is the tragic hero as we've often been told, a Nepo Baby out to rule the Corporate World, or a royal-blooded, serial killer?

The extraordinarily talented cast includes leather-clad Patrick Ballas the many-sided Hamlet, with (in alphabetical order) James T. Alfred as Head Attendant, Joe Chrestas trenchcoat-clad Detective Fortinbras and The Ghost, Fidel Gomezas Gravedigger, Ty Molbakas uptight Laertes and street-wise Rosencrantz, Ramiz Monsefas Polonius whose backstage secrets will astound you, Coral Peñaas both sides of the less-than-virginal Ophelia, Jakeem Powell as Hamlet's devoted best friend Horatio, Ariel Shafir as moneyman Claudius, Jaime Lincoln Smith as First Player whose play-within-the-play Tik Tok sets the murderous rampage in motion, stunning Gina Torresas fur-laden Gertrude who knows how to pull the Corporate strings, and Daniel Zuhlkeas street-wise Guildenstern. Each is dressed to perfection to indicate their social standing by Costume Designer Dede Ayite with Hair, Wig & Makeup Design by J. Jared Janas.

Hamlet runs through July 6 on Tuesday through Friday evenings at 8 p.m.; Saturdays at 2:30 p.m. and 8 p.m.;

Sundays at 1 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., at the Mark Taper Forum at The Music Center. Tickets start at \$40.25, available through <https://www.centertheatregroup.org>, Audience Services at (213) 972-4400 or in person at the Center Theatre Group Box Office at The Music Center, 135 N. Grand Avenue in Downtown LA 90012.



*The company of **Gatsby Redux** invites the audience to "Meet the Elite of East Egg" at Greystone Mansion and Gardens. (Photo credit: Barry Weiss)*

Mixed eMotion Theatrix (MeMT) has returned to the Greystone Mansion and Gardens in Beverly Hills with its production **Gatsby Redux** which invites audience members to follow dancers representing the characters in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* novel on an exciting and evocative 90-minute journey into the fabulous 1920s party scene around which the novel's tales of love and betrayal unfold. Due to the historic nature of the grounds, various outdoor scenes involve walking on slate, grass, and stairs, so comfortable shoes are a must, as is following helpful guides to keep the scenes moving along at a quick pace before darkness falls. And

against the backdrop of the vintage gardens and mansion, it's easy to immerse yourself into the glory days of Greystone where such parties were commonplace among society's upper crust, just as they were on Gatsby's estate in East Egg.

Since performing *Gatsby Redux* at Greystone in 2022 and 2024, MeMT has toured it nationally and internationally, bringing the production to historic estates, train depots, and other era-appropriate locations. But Greystone is the favorite location of the production's Director/Choreographer Janet Roston, who shares, "This is the centennial year of the novel's publishing, and we're so happy to be part of the celebration of *The Great Gatsby*." And what an artistic, action-filled celebration it is!

The performance begins in the mansion's grand foyer where we meet Daisy Buchanan (Tiffany Wolff), a frivolous and troubled young woman who seems to enjoy dancing her problems away. With her are several party-loving followers, drinking and dancing up a storm until the break of day. Their antics move from the Mansion's Front Lawn, to a hot hotel room in New York City where we find Daisy's brutal husband Tom (Andrii Strelkivskyi) cavorting with red-haired Myrtle Wilson (Sarah Wines) during their impressively athletic seduction scene. And after Tom finally leaves, Myrtle is comforted by Catherine (Natalie Oga) who reminds her sister that she is better off without him. Their tender scene reminds us that no matter how bad things get romantically, a true sister, whether by birth or choice, will never abandon you.

Several standout party scenes are highlights of the production including during "A Spectacle on the Front Lawn" during which Daisy finds herself at the center of a romantic flag-bearing entourage reminiscent of "The Merry Month of May" from *Camelot*, and "A Garden Party at the Mansion" which includes dancers playing a stylized game of croquet. Then after meeting "The Elite of East Egg" in the now-dry Greystone pool, during which just as much flirting takes place as dancing, we watch "A Solitary Nick, Late Night at Home" performed by lithe Donny Collinson, before we get to eavesdrop on "An Intimate Meeting with Gatsby and Daisy" in an intimate garden setting during which their passionate dance is interrupted by Daisy's husband Tom which escalates into humorous push-me-pull-you movements. Frustrated, Tom throws a protesting Daisy over his shoulder, leaving "Gatsby Alone" to work out his sense of abandonment through expressive dance movement, exquisitely performed by Timothy Lewis.

The adventure ends with "A Return to Revelry at the Mansion" which takes place in the outdoor courtyard where projections designed by Joe Larue light up the Greystone entry archway, starting with art deco Mickey Mouse cartoon scenes and graduating into several artistic representations of party scenes, some including fireworks! It was quite the spectacle watching all ten dancers kick up their heels and celebrate such a joyous evening in a perfectly carefree setting.

Gatsby Redux performances continue June 11-14 at Greystone Gardens and Mansion, 905 Loma Vista Drive in Beverly Hills, begin at 7 p.m., with guests encouraged to arrive by 6:30pm to park and walk through the lovely gardens down to the mansion where the show begins. Audience members are encouraged to dress in 1920s-themed attire and take photos on the beautiful terrace of Greystone prior to the introductory scene inside the mansion's foyer. The City of Beverly Hills Community Services Department is hosting this site-specific dance theater production. Tickets are \$25 for Beverly Hills residents and \$30 for non-residents, with advance reservations required at <https://beverlyhills.org/1327/Gatsby-Redux>