



Presents

Ophelia Thinks Harder

by Jean Betts and William Shakespeare

Tuesday 28 September – Saturday 2 October 2021
The Bridewell Theatre

Production team

Director	Matt Bentley
Producer	Olly Levett
Designer	Yvette Henderson
Committee Liaison	Adam Coppard

Background

Ophelia Thinks Harder was due to be performed in March 2020, one week after the first lockdown was announced. Due to the way the world and individual circumstances have changed, we are now seeking auditionees for several roles.

Synopsis

Ophelia is struggling with the constraints placed on her by her social status – as a woman, as a royal, and as a player trapped in a male narrative. However, after a series of encounters with ghosts, actors, wise women and psychologists she is given fresh hope. Will Ophelia realise her own agency and break out of the patriarchal chains of Hamlet's story, or remain trapped forever? Ophelia Thinks Harder is a riotous comedy that subverts our expectations of Shakespeare's heroine, and yes – she gets to do the "To be or not to be" speech.

Style

The characters of this play are very familiar. For the most part, they feel locked in the roles ascribed to them by Hamlet's story, which is happening on stage. It makes sense, then, to assume that the action takes place off stage: in the wings, dressing rooms, and green room. The set will be a surreal theatrical limbo, taking props, set and costumes from other shows and co-opting them into a new, organised jumble of theatricality.

Ophelia Thinks Harder is an intriguing mix of absurdism, comedy and pathos. Some of the dialogue is witty and brisk, while other parts are more impassioned diatribes, worthy of a Shakespearean hero. The emotion is always heightened, and we will be looking for ways to play with the text to allow for textures within the dialogue.

To add to this, the show needs to feel like the entire Elsinore court is present, going about their everyday lives. When particular characters aren't taking part in the central action, we will be looking for ways to include them in the background or as part of the chaos, without distracting from the core story. Either way, we will aim to use everyone to the fullest possible extent.

There will also be the opportunity for some devised work. Several scenes – most notably the prologue and the play-within-the-play have been left open for interpretation, so we will be looking for people who can help us flesh out those moments in a funny and fitting way.

What are we looking for

The roles to be auditioned for are listed below. As this play deals substantially with gender and gender roles, the list below shows the gender each character needs to present as. The exceptions to this are the Players, which are written as male but don't need to be believable as men if women are cast in those roles.

Maid (f) – a much put-upon servant. Frequently the subject of harassment and abuse. The counterpoint to Ophelia, and a representative of the serving classes who don't have an opportunity to improve their situation. Very superstitious, to the detriment of her sanity.

Rosencrantz (f) – a behavioural psychologist come to observe Hamlet. Takes a keener interest in Ophelia.

Guiltenstern (f) – another behavioural psychologist come to observe Hamlet. Also takes a keener interest in Ophelia.

St Joan/Woman 3 (f) – the ghost of Joan of Arc. Also plays a mysterious wise woman.

Woman 2/Queen's Maid (f) – another mysterious wise woman, and a handmaid to the Queen.

Laertes (m) – Ophelia's brother and a prime example of toxic masculinity.

Player 1 (m) - one of the band of travelling players come to perform for the court (but is that their only mission?) Takes on the role of the Father in the play-within-the-play.

Player 2 (m) - one of the band of travelling players come to perform for the court (but is that their only mission?) Takes on the role of the Mother in the play-within-the-play.

Key Dates

- Auditions – Tuesday 13 and Saturday 17 July 2021
- Recalls (if needed) – Tuesday 20 July 2021
- First read-through – Sunday 1 August 2021
- First rehearsal – Tuesday 3 August 2021
- Rehearsals will be on Tuesday & Thursday evenings, and Sunday afternoons
- Dress rehearsal – Monday 27 September 2021
- Performance dates at the Bridewell Theatre – Tuesday 28 September – Saturday 2 October 2021

Auditions

Tuesday 13 (7pm-10pm) and Saturday 17 July 2021 (2pm-6pm) - 1 Brewers Hall Gardens, Moorgate, EC2V 5BX

- Each audition slot will be ten minutes long.
- You will be asked to deliver a short Shakespeare monologue of your choice (no more than 20 lines, and please don't choose anything from Hamlet)
- You will then be asked to read your choice of one of the attached scenes. If your preferred character does not have a scene in the pack, please read any scene.
- You do not need to be off book for the monologue or the scene – in fact, we would prefer you read so you can focus on your performance rather than remembering your lines.

Recall – invitation only

Tuesday 20 July 2021 - 1 Brewers Hall Gardens, Moorgate, EC2V 5BX

- 7pm – 10pm.
- If you are invited to the recall audition, you will be sent group scenes to prepare.
- Again, there is no need to be off book for these scenes, but please be familiar with the text.

Booking an Audition

To book an audition, visit <http://membership.sedos.co.uk>

Please cancel your slot online or email us at ophelia@sedos.co.uk if you are unable to make a booked audition.

Fees

Auditions are free although if cast you will be required to become a Sedos member.

Backstage

Sedos is always looking for volunteers to help with set building, sewing costumes, working Front of House or backstage. If you are interested in getting involved in any capacity please contact the team at ophelia@sedos.co.uk.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals will be held at 1 Brewers Hall Garden, EC2V 5BX on Tuesdays & Thursdays from 7:30pm – 9:30pm and on Saturdays from 2pm – 5pm (sometimes extended to 6pm if needed).

We will try to schedule rehearsals based around cast availability as much as possible, but please indicate on your audition form any dates you are unavailable. Please be honest - this will not necessarily stop you from being cast.

See you at the auditions!

Audition Scenes

Maid

OPHELIA Aaargh! I want to make things *happen!*

MAID There is a divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will...

OPHELIA Fool, I only want to help make happen what's going to happen anyway. If I knew my fate; if I was sure of his name, I could avoid all the doubts and confusions and embarrassments... save so much *time*...!

MAID Madam, I see a Q!

OPHELIA Q? I know no Qs. And even if I did, what should I do? Pace the floor until he happened to see *my* initial in an onion? Sit like patience on a monument?

MAID Madam, there is much that can be done...

OPHELIA Oh I give up. What's the point in doing anything? I'm just going to give up, and sit here for the rest of my life, and be – bewildered. It's the only honest existence. The world's a prison.

The MAID furtively reveals a small, distinctive phial of bright red potion.

OPHELIA Now what?

MAID Madam, this is a very powerful magic; a most dangerous potion – it must only be used as a last resort. One drop of this in contact with the skin will make man or woman madly dote upon the next live creature it sees.

OPHELIA Madly dote?

MAID Helplessly in love.

OPHELIA Live creature. Dog? Goldfish? *(She smells it)* Phew! What's in it?

MAID Spawn of a frog that's been steeped in hellebore, semen of a bull collected after copulation, blood of worms, faeces of sheep and...

OPHELIA Uggh! Is this a love potion or a curse?

MAID True – the recipes are very similar...

OPHELIA Hmm. Sounds a bit hit and miss. You'll have to be a last resort, poison of Cupid. *(She throws the phial down)* Oh, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this pretty pace from day to day...

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

ROSENCRANTZ Now – nuns and virgins – this is an area of enquiry that has absorbed us considerably, Guildenstern.

GUILDENSTERN It certainly has, Rosencrantz. Now let me see; virgins. The cult of the virgin didn't begin till the 13th century...

ROSENCRANTZ The cult of Joseph as head of a holy family – 15th century...

GUILDENSTERN Marriage didn't become a sacrament – till death do us part and all that stuff, till – 1563?

ROSENCRANTZ I think 4.

GUILDENSTERN The best marriage in the eyes of God is one where the partners remain virgins. St Augustine.

ROSENCRANTZ And St Bernard of Clairvaux gave – 86 sermons?

GUILDENSTERN 87.

ROSENCRANTZ 87 sermons on the Song of Songs, demanding we become inebriated with love, purple with passion – and at the same time, deny all physical desires.

GUILDENSTERN And as for St Theresa...

ROSENCRANTZ I don't think she's ready for Theresa, Guildenstern.

GUILDENSTERN Right. Well – we had a problem with all that stuff, didn't we Rosencrantz?

ROSENCRANTZ We found the church's obsession with chastity incompre-bloody-hensible.

GUILDENSTERN Mass hysteria; a lunacy epidemic.

ROSENCRANTZ Healthy desire contorted into a rather nasty form of sado-masochism...

GUILDENSTERN The basis of the aforementioned vocation.

ROSENCRANTZ You see, while a nun is 'free', in a manner of speaking...

GUILDENSTERN ...*she is free in a system that despises women.*

BOTH Conundrum.

St Joan

ST JOAN Can you hear me?

OPHELIA Yes!

ST JOAN Will you *listen* to me, and not interrupt, or run away panicking halfway through what it is I have to say?

OPHELIA Yes; yes I'll listen. Stay, illusion!

ST JOAN Oh, at last! I will be brief and clear. (*She gets out her notes*) I have not long. Now. You had a king, who was - no forget that bit. There is a man, Fortinbras whose father was killed by ... no, never mind. (*Throws away her notes*) Brevity is the soul of wit. Listen; this is all that matters now. There is an angry army marching this way at this very moment, who aim to kill you all. This is clear?

OPHELIA This is clear. Who is Fortinbras? Who are you?

ST JOAN You must tell the king. You must mobilise! You must defeat this foe or you will be overwhelmed! There. This is the message I am sent to give you. At last I have given it.

OPHELIA Who are you?

ST JOAN My name is Joan. Joan of Arc. When I was alive no one would listen to me either – not till I heard my voices; *then* they took notice. But even then, all they were interested in was sainthood, miracles, whether I was a virgin. My mission was urgent – I had armies to organise! Yes, it's tough for a woman to get people to listen.

OPHELIA Armies?

ST JOAN I am a soldier.

OPHELIA A soldier? You pretended you were a man?

ST JOAN Never! God forbid! Joan the Maid, the Maid of Orleans.

OPHELIA And they accepted you, in the army? I'm astounded.

ST JOAN Accepted me? I *led* the army, girl.

Laertes

LAERTES My lords, the King requests your presence.

HAMLET O he does, does he?

LAERTES My lord, unhand my sister – you know the rules.

LAERTES *grabs her other wrist; they yank her back and forth.*

HAMLET We all know the rules Laertes, otherwise there'd be no fun in breaking them, now would there?

LAERTES Oh I agree; but the amount of fun depends on the number of brothers you have to deal with later, whose honour depends on the behaviour of their sisters.

OPHELIA *(To LAERTES, under breath)* **Piss off!**

HAMLET Laertes, thou art as dear to me as any brother. How could Hamlet wrong Laertes?

LAERTES My sister's virginity is of great concern to me, my lord.

HAMLET Ah, would that it were *my* concern!

They laugh, and drop OPHELIA.

LAERTES Ah, men! *(He puts his arms round them)* The company of men! Out of the sickly air and into a fresh, wholesome breeze! Oh I would grapple thee to me with hoops of steel. Straightforward, honest, brave, healthy men!