

Presents ….

**Ophelia Thinks Harder**

by Jean Betts and William Shakespeare

Tuesday 31 March – Saturday 4 April 2020

The Bridewell Theatre

**Production team**

Director Matt Bentley

Assistant Director Maria Jones

Producer Olly Levett

Committee Liaison Adam Coppard

**Synopsis**

Ophelia is struggling with the constraints place 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 breakdown below is the maximum cast we will consider. It is possible that some of these roles may be combined.

**Female characters**

***Ophelia*** – our hero. A clear-thinking everywoman, intelligent but not allowed to show it. In mourning for her mother. Begins the show completely beholden to the expectations of society, and learns to take matters into her own hands. Onstage for most of the show, with significant dialogue.

***Maid*** – 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.

***Queen*** – Hamlet’s mother and a representation of the traditional expectations of society. Encourages Ophelia to empower herself by letting a man take care of her. Controls the King as a literal puppet.

***Rosencrantz*** – a behavioural psychologist come to observe Hamlet. Takes a keener interest in Ophelia.

***Guildenstern*** – another behavioural psychologist come to observe Hamlet. Also takes a keener interest in Ophelia.

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

***Player 3/Woman 1*** – 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 Lover in the play-within-the-play. Also plays a mysterious wise woman.

***Ophelia’s Mother/Queen’s Maid*** – the ghost of Ophelia’s mother, chattering on as if she’s not dead. Also plays an ever-present handmaid to the Queen.

***Woman 2/Queen’s Maid*** – another mysterious wise woman, and another handmaid to the Queen.

**Male Characters**

***Hamlet*** – an absolute prat. Completely wrapped up in his own world, only seeing Ophelia as an entitlement, and expecting her to fall head over heels for him no matter how he treats her.

***Horatio*** – Ophelia’s friend and one of the few sympathetic male characters in the play. Harbouring a dark secret.

***Polonius*** – Ophelia’s father. Very much a symbol of societal expectations. His wife has recently died, but he is quickly moving on and expects Ophelia to do the same.

***Laertes*** – Ophelia’s brother and another prime example of toxic masculinity.

***Player 1*** - 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*** - 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.

***Player 4*** - 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 Daughter in the play-within-the-play.

**Key Dates**

* Workshop – Wednesday 11 December 2019
* Auditions – Saturday 11, Sunday 12, Tuesday 14 January 2020
* Recall – Saturday 18 January 2020
* First read-through – Sunday 2 February 2020
* First rehearsal – Monday 3 February 2020
* Rehearsals will be on Mondays & Wednesday nights and Sunday afternoons
* Dress rehearsal – Monday 30 March 2020
* Performance dates at the Bridewell Theatre – Tuesday 31 March – Saturday 4 April 2020

**Workshop**

**Wednesday 11 December 2019, 7:30pm - 1 Brewers Hall Gardens, Moorgate, EC2V 5BX**

The workshop will include:

* Introduction to the team & the play
* Group activities
* A look at some scenes
* Sign up at <http://sedos.co.uk/signup.php> (this isn’t compulsory, but it gives us an idea of numbers)

**Auditions**

**Saturday 11, Sunday 12 & Tuesday 14 January 2020 - 1 Brewers Hall Gardens, Moorgate, EC2V 5BX**

* Each audition slot will be one hour long.
* Auditions will feature a group exercise and individual auditions.
* The group exercise will be a short improvisation activity.
* For the individual auditions, 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) and read your choice of one of the attached scenes.
* Anyone auditioning for OPHELIA will also be asked to deliver the Ophelia Monologue.
* 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**

**Saturday 18 January 2020 - 1 Brewers Hall Gardens, Moorgate, EC2V 5BX**

* 2pm – 6pm. Times may vary.
* 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://sedos.co.uk/signup.php>

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

**Fees**

Auditions are free for Sedos members and £5 for non-members (this is non-refundable even if you are cast in a show). If cast you will be required to become a Sedos member (currently £30 per year if you pay by direct debit or £35 in cash) and pay a participation fee of £30.

**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](mailto:ophelia@sedos.co.uk).

**Rehearsals**

Rehearsals will be held at 1 Brewers Hall Garden, EC2V 5BX on Mondays & Wednesdays from 7:30pm – 9:30pm and on Sundays from 2pm – 6pm.

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 workshop & auditions!

**Audition Scenes**

***Maid and Ophelia***

**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…

***Hamlet and Horatio***

**HAMLET** *(Reading from thesaurus)* …sublime, heavenly, superb, glorious, ravishing, gorgeous, highly coloured; beaming, sparkling, magnificent, curvaceous… well stacked…

**HORATIO** Why not just – ‘lovely’?

**HAMLET** Lovely. Love. *(Looking it up)* No score.

**HORATIO** No score?

**HAMLET** Tennis. Hmm. Desire, affection… uxoriousness…

**HORATIO** What’s wrong with ‘thou art more lovely’ – it’s simple, direct –

**HAMLET** Simple; yes, she has trouble with big words. Then what?

**HORATIO** …’and more’ something else…

**HAMLET** Something else. *(He thinks, frustrated)* Oh for a muse of fire that would ascend the brightest heaven of invention! Umm – sexy, shapely…

**HORATIO** More shapely than summer?

**HAMLET** Well what then?

**HORATIO** Ummm… gentle, sweet, warm…

**HAMLET** Luscious, tempting…

**HORATIO** Temperate! Yes, temperate! Yes, you see because then you can go on about what’s *wrong* with the weather… *(He scribbles excitedly)*

**HAMLET** What’s *wrong* with it? Strange approach for a love poem. Still, if it keeps her wondering, that’s good. Keep her sweet. Keep her onside. Keep her on her toes.

**HORATIO** There! *(He shows it to HAMLET)*

**HAMLET** *(He reads it)* …did you have to bring death into it?

**HORATIO** But we need the final couplet still…

**HAMLET** Something about love, please!

***Queen***

**QUEEN** As with any job, the boss decides the conditions. They want sweet breath, big tits, endless sex, terrific food, emotional support – then do it. They want a coper, cope. They want a helpless airhead, do it. They want kids, do it. They don’t? Hmm; well come to me and I’ll help you out when the time comes. *(To the MAID)* That reminds me, I hear there is a new… cure?

**MAID** Yes ma’am – a mixture of horseflies, leeches, turnips, monkey brains and mercury. Very effective.

**QUEEN** Good, I’ll place an order. And one thing they all want, one vision that’s in all their heads, whatever they tell you – a pure, sweet, submissive little virgin. A *virgin* mind. So watch it. No wobbling.

**OPHELIA** Can’t I just be myself?...

**QUEEN** ‘Be yourself’? Ha! Only men have that luxury – and you don’t want to be like a man, do you? Men can be themselves – but we have to *work* at being women…

**OPHELIA** What? Work at it?

**QUEEN** Yes, yes! You see, my dear – men are at the centre of the world. They don’t have to define themselves. They can take their masculinity for granted, whereas we… I know, it’s tough, but it’s our duty.

And think of the poor dears, sweating away in a boardroom and on a battlefield – for *us* – our protection and support; our children. We’re at their mercy, for sure; but in return we have it easy. Men have their needs, their fantasies – it’s our job to divine them and provide them. Let’s bring a little sweetness and joy into their dour little lives – we’re shaped this way to please them, after all – so what’s a few ribbons, a bit of paint? For the satisfaction of being the inspirers of male glory…

**OPHELIA** Our shape? I thought it was... for children…?

**QUEEN** Don’t look so glum. Of course it’s all tiresome at times, but we learn to get our own way; I can show you how to handle them – but cleverly, so they don’t know! You can manipulate him, you can fool him – the hen can rule the roost and the cock thinks *he* does…!

**OPHELIA** They can’t *all* be fools!

**QUEEN** Children! They’re all children! The darlings, they never grow up.

***Polonius***

POLONIUS Right. And now, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

Tis told me he hath very oft of late

given private time to you; and you yourself

have of your audience been most free and bounteous.

What is between you? Give me up the truth.

OPHELIA He hath my lord, of late made many tenders of his affection for me.

POLONIUSAffection! Pooh! You speak like a green girl

unsuited in such perilous circumstances.

Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

OPHELIA …I do not know, my lord, what I should think…

POLONIUSMarry, I will teach you: think yourself a baby

that you have taken these tenders for true pay

which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;

of – not to crack the wind of a poor phrase,

running it thus – you’ll tender me a fool.

Your chastity’s the jewel of our house, bequeathed down from many

illustrious ancestors.

OPHELIA Yes my lord.

POLONIUS Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star; this must not be.

In short –

I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth

have you so slander any moment’s leisure

as to give words or talk to the Lord Hamlet.

Is that quite clear?

OPHELIA Quite clear, my lord.

POLONIUS And now – you have finished sorting my notes? *(OPHELIA gives them to him)* Good. Now by noon on Friday – here; The Unfinished Works of Puncher and Wattman.

*He thrusts a pile of heavy books into OPHELIA’s arms.*

I require all references to tennis. There will be several. And any mention of skulls; of that possibility I’m less certain. But remember to rest often – women must beware forcing the brain. It leads to nervousness, anaemia, stunted growth, anorexia and flat chests. Your children will be puny and enfeebled. And remember what I’ve said regarding Hamlet.

***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.

***Ophelia Monologue***

Hamlet? Hamlet killed my father?

Now I could drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as

The day would quake to look on!

O come you spirits

that tend on mortal thoughts; unsex me here;

and fill me, from the crown to the toe, top full

of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,

stop up the access and passage to remorse

that no compunctious visitings of nature

shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

th’effect and it. Come to my woman’s breasts,

and take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers –

Oh, bloody, bawdy villain!

remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

Oh, vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,

That I, the child of a dear father murdered

must, like a sailor, unpack my heart

with words, and fall a’cursing like a politician!

Fie upon it. Foh!

Suit the word to the action.

About my brains.