

To see or not to see

Eternal Hamlet a cinematic success

by Angel Figueroa

YOU'VE GOT TO be skeptical when hearing of Hollywood's intent to produce their version of *Hamlet*, one of drama's most demanding creations. Even moreso when Mad Max is slated for the leading role.

Despite the respectable name of Zeffirelli, Mel Gibson's stardom doesn't prevent you from assuming yet another mutilation of another great play. However, as Zeffirelli does not disappoint, the dashing rebel from down under delivers a very pleasant and rewarding surprise.

Franco Zeffirelli, who brought us *Romeo and Juliet* and *Taming of the Shrew*, has embarked on his boldest ambition ever, ignoring the critics who were calling it suicide. Twenty-two years after he immortalized the world's most famous love story, he has established himself as a cinematic giant, alongside Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, and Akira Kurasawa. Motifs abound, his newest film carries an aura as distinctive as his two previous films, perhaps even greater.

What is immediately striking is how well Gibson seems to suit the

role of the Prince of Denmark. His resolute, slightly mad, sense of humour is as much a part of Shakespeare's prodigy as Gibson's own personality. His feature roles in *Gallipoli* and *The Year of Living Dangerously* only set the stage for his greatest performance ever. You'll be convinced that the darting eyes, veneerish smirk, and intense aura of Hamlet was perhaps made to suit Mel Gibson.

Cast alongside Gibson is Glenn Close and Helena Bonham-Carter as the Queen Gertrude and Ophelia, daughter of the lord chamberlain Polonius. Bonham-Carter is simply brilliant. Her enchanting character in *A Room With a View* is matched by this polar role as a girl gone mad from torn loyalties and the shock of her father's murder by Hamlet, whom she loves dearly. As adaptable Gibson is to his role, Bonham-Carter immortalizes hers. But Close's portrayal of queen Gertrude leaves more to be desired.

Given the dynamic complexity of the play, Zeffirelli had to formulate a plot acceptable to Hollywood. Inevitably, this becomes the main liability. But Zeffirelli does his best not to destroy key elements integral to Shakespeare's creation



Mel Gibson confronts Glenn Close in the exasperating scene of Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*.

and message. As a director producing an eternal play, Zeffirelli has proved himself a mature artist in not surpassing certain boundaries. As a film maker, he has done the best anyone could have in dramatizing the play, considering Hollywood's grip on production and marketing. However, as a producer of Shakespeare, he has created certain fallacies.

Hamlet is soliloquy, yet some were edited or shuffled around. Certain scenes were cut short, such as Hamlet's instructions to the players, while the opening scene with the ghost was cut completely. Some dialogues were edited substantially, which created subtle anachronisms. The character of Fortinbras was non-existent. While even the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern was depicted, only a few lines remain of the play-within-the-play, an important part of the story.

There are some interesting anomalies between Zeffirelli and Olivier's 1948 version. Zeffirelli stressed incest in the exasperating scene following the murder of Polonius, whereas Olivier had only suggested it. While Olivier envisioned Hamlet as an immature boy of genius in the grip of melancholia, Zeffirelli uses an older Hamlet as a more vibrant but elusive character, more passionate and unpredictable, devious and aloof, less of a brooder yet more of a sa-

thetic. While Olivier's *Hamlet* begins at the end with Hamlet's funeral, Zeffirelli's begins at a crypt entombing his father, the dead king.

Renowned Shakespearean actors Paul Scofield, Alan Bates, and Ian Holm, each of whom had played Hamlet himself sometime in his career, give convincing and excellent adaptations of Claudius, Polonius, and the ghost of Hamlet's father. Alan Bates especially succeeds in the pragmatic character of the king, who is as diplomatic and devious with his wife as with his nephew.

Nathaniel Parker as Laertes, Stephen Dillane as Horatio, and John McEnery as Osric supplement the cast effectively with their unusual talents and exceptionally untypical looks. Although their roles are notably edited, Horatio and Laertes are the sensitive characters they're supposed to be.

Attention to set design and costume is ravishing. (This is not surprising, considering Zeffirelli's experience as operatic director). However, the lush sensuousness of the photography may be distracting to those who would otherwise prefer the rich Shakespearean dialogue to be the production's primary asset. This effect is heightened by the emphatic musical score by Ennio Morricone. Simply atmospheric, as opposed to

thematic or dynamic as in *The Mission* and *Chariots of Fire*, it offers an effective compromise between dramatic action and dubious intellectualism. This affords probably the film's greatest merit: it becomes generally understandable and appreciative by the inauspicious and wary student of Shakespeare. (Whether or not this is acceptable to the skeptics of the realist school is another matter).

Zeffirelli's usual flamboyancy and vociferation, so conspicuous in his earlier two works, is now more mature and considerate: less roaring, more subtle in character, with more metaphysical tension, pronounced pale lighting, and muted or pastel colours resonating within the dim (but not Gothic) castle interior.

Zeffirelli's vision and Gibson's interpretation of Hamlet is strikingly modern and existential in certain aspects — as timeless yet contemporary as great plays befit. As massively appealing as *Romeo and Juliet* was to youths in 1968, so too is *Hamlet* in 1991. He shows Hamlet as a young person in a chaotic, ambivalent world — independent yet superfluous, with doubts and hopes, haunted by the mysteries of fate and the paradoxes of life, chastised by the scruples of his conscience, and searching for his soul within an intense and puzzling consciousness.

Art show a must see

by Alberta Schaap

COMING TO Anna Leonowens Gallery Feb. 12-16 is senior NSCAD student Jacques Albert's grad show "MASK IN VISION". Using state of the art technology, Albert has created a variety of computer-generated images which he will show, together with a hand-carved mask. The mask, larger than life and suspended from the ceiling, is a massive undertaking which has taken two years to complete. It's an intriguing metamorphosis, from bulls' skull with eagles' heads for eyes, to outspread thighs in the throes of birthing. The computer images also speak of metamorphosis and transformation. One, entitled "The First Birth of the Animal Nature," depicts an organic horse-like mass emerging from the primordial earth. Another, called "The Compromised", shows elegant elemental human forms precariously perched on the cubes of logos or reason.

Throughout these images and more, there is a strong connection to the earth and nature, set in opposition to the realm of spirit and cosmos, the realms where Albert says true transformation occurs. For it is change being depicted here, the infinite cyclic process of life to death and back to life again, a process which resides in the spirit realm and plays out on the earth

stage.

Though the choice of wood and computer may seem to be an unusual combination of materials, Albert's approach to both is intuitive and reflective. With only some initial sense of design, he manoeuvres in a communicative way with the material until the image emerges, much in the same way that the Inuit coax and release images from the stones they carve. For art is, at its best, a process, never complete, always drawing forth. In this way of working, Albert has found the computer to be especially useful. It is, to him, more cyclic and flowing, because the source (of the image) is always available. The image can be altered, moved forward or backward, and yet always remains, in the source, the same. Thus the seed (source) is constant, as, cosmically, the seed of life is constant in death, the seed of death in life.

Albert draws some of his imagery from myth, yet throughout works through and for himself and the process. This show in Gallery 3, together with the computer-generated imagery of Robert Rogers, NSCAD faculty, in Gallery 1, is a good opportunity to see how, graphically, computer technology can be put to use. Showing concurrently in Gallery 2 is the sculpture work of NSCAD student 'ris Seyler. All three shows are well worth taking in.

Women's blues review

by Barbara Leiterman and Munju Ravindra

"IT'S AS GOOD as good sex"
"And more available sometimes"

Two older women summed it up during the intermission of Black Woman's Blues Revue.

The evening held at the Casino

Theatre was hosted by Charla Williams and was opened with her sister Murlletta Williams. In true *Gazeteer* style we missed the first act, so Murlletta Williams' performance will go unreviewed. We heard it was great.

The second performer was Kim Bernard. When she started 'Inseparable' by Natalie Cole, the audience broke into yelping and

claps at the first word. This was followed by a Gwen Guthrie tune, 'Close to You'. It began with slow sulky vocals, then a pregnant silence, until the drums, trumpet and bass jumped in with a tight fast beat. Bernard caught the beat on an upswing, settling into a boppity blues tempo that had the audience

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