

Long Live the King

Slapstick meets serious Shakespeare in a three-month trilogy at Actors NET in Morrisville.

ACTORS' NET of Bucks County has a post-holiday gift to give, though it will take three months to unwrap. Not to spoil the secret, but it is a special three-month theatrical event — *The Hamlet Trilogy* — serving Shakespeare sandwiched between two movie-

highhearted works. Actors' NET will offer Paul Rudnick's comedy *I Hate Hamlet* Jan. 12 through 28, followed by William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Feb. 16 through Mar. 4. The trilogy completed with Tom Stoppard's comedy *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* Mar. 16 through April 1.

"I always thought it would be fun to stage *Hamlet* & *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* together because they have the same cast," says Actors' NET artistic director Cheryl Doyle, a Morrisville resident. She believes modern comedy *I Hate Hamlet* might get those members of the audience who aren't terribly familiar with Shakespeare in the mood for *Hamlet*. And *Hamlet* will enable the audience to understand *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, which introduces a totally different side of players in *Hamlet*.

"It's going to be fun," she says, "to try and integrate to some degree, the take on the story that's in Stoppard's play and see how much of it we can incorporate into how we play *Hamlet*."

For those unfamiliar with Tom Stoppard's play, 11 minor characters from *Hamlet*, *Rosencrantz* and *Guildenstern*, take center stage in the surreal comedy. Scenes from *Hamlet* — in this case with the same actors — take place throughout the comedy.

"It's heady, it's sly; occasionally it gets a little sticky," says Ms. Doyle, who will direct *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. Ms. Doyle's husband, managing director Joe Doyle, will direct *I Hate Hamlet*. In Paul Rudnick's witty stab at the master bard, *I Hate Hamlet*, an actor, cast as Hamlet, is frightened of playing the part. Help magically appears when the ghost of a mouse thespian shows up to give the man acting lessons.

"It's an understanding view on people trying to cope with this big play," Ms. Doyle says.

Make no mistake: The original *Hamlet* is a massive work. Weeks of editing shared by Ms. Doyle and Hamlet, George Hartpence of Lambertville, N.J., brought the play down to just under three hours. It was tedious work, cutting line-by-line instead of the often-empto cutting scene-by-scene. This allowed character and background to remain, especially important within the context of a trilogy. Ms. Doyle says the editing has allowed production to retain all major characters, scenes and elements.

"This is a labor of love for both of us," says Mr. Hartpence. "And it really has to be to devote this much of your life to it, that's for sure."

With comedies before and after, the production of *Hamlet* is the trilogy's showcase. Ms. Doyle's goal presenting Shakespeare in this manner "is to present a great play — not do Shakespeare because it's Shakespeare."



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To experience life through the arts, to know, to see the really high emotions of life translated that way, then you are not alone. If you're willing to go to the outer darkness of human experience and come back, then the next time life takes you there you can get through," says Cheryl Doyle speaking of Shakespeare's plays. Above, top to bottom, George Hartpence, Keith Kerns and Tammy Koehler.