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**SUU'S DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS & DANCE
PUTS A UNIQUE SPIN ON SHAKESPEARE'S CLASSIC TRAGEDY
*HAMLET***

Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah: The prince of Denmark undergoes a unique transformation in **SUU's Department of Theatre Arts & Dance's** production of William Shakespeare's renowned tragedy *Hamlet*. The title character will be played by a woman with gender reverse casting in other prominent roles. This innovative rendering of the classic will be the final production in the **Adams Memorial Theatre** with performances on **October 2, 5, 8, 9 and 10 at 7:30pm**. The production is directed by **Peter Sham**, who has staged SUU's productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It*.

This unique production of *Hamlet* is set in a non-specific time period heavily influenced in its design concept by the matriarchal society of Danish Vikings in which women assumed leadership roles typically held by men. While doing his research for his design concept of the show, scenic designer **Brian Jude Beacom** realized, "everyone was able to fight and defend their homes so others could go on voyages for the goods they needed and desired. So if we start here and assume the Matriarchy we can move forward....They grew into traders yet remained warriors, there was no objectification of men and they proceeded to a more gender-neutral society in fashion and manner....Their leaders were intelligent women with quick wits and the warrior's strength."

Peter Sham, director, addresses the play and his concept, "*Hamlet*. It's a title and play of such scope and familiarity; a ghost story that deals with madness, revenge, family, marriage, threats, duplicity, treachery, deceit and more. How can we make it new, our own, or perhaps even allow a new generation of audiences to see it from a different perspective? That was the question I asked myself when I set out on the journey of directing Shakespeare's epic piece last spring. I realized that the senior women in our department made up the bulk of the strength of our theatre program. Because of this I decided to cast with an open mind, and as one actress after another began to dazzle, the thought of setting Hamlet in a Matriarchy emerged. Why not a Hamlet who was a woman? Not a woman playing a man, but a woman. I

believe Hamlet is arguably the most brilliant mind ever written - brilliant and spirited and beautiful. Couldn't that be played by a woman as well as a man? And, if so, why not a female Claudius? A murdered Ghost Mother? A female Horatio, Laertes and more? And why couldn't the famous female roles, Ophelia and Gertrude, be men? Why not? We invite you to open your minds and see Hamlet from another side, a Hamlet for a new generation."

As for the young actress playing the conflicted Danish royalty, **Halie Merrill**, "I have tried and tried to find the right words to express how I feel about getting the chance to portray Hamlet, and I keep ending up with multiple paragraphs, pontificating about life and death and everything in between, and talking about how brilliant the play is and how sad and fascinating and bewitching the character is, but all that has been said before. I don't need to explain to anyone how amazing Hamlet is. That's been done already, by many people, and it's not the way to explain how I feel. The best way to do that is to be honest, and the truth is: I am terrified. I am grateful, I am excited, and I am terrified. *It's Hamlet!* It doesn't get more intimidating than that for a young actor, especially with the unique chance I get as a woman to play the part. But, a huge part of my life more recently has been to follow the fear. To accept the challenge. To fight with everything I have. And I am going to give this production everything I have."

This past summer Halie Merrill was in SUU's Fellowship Program at the Utah Shakespeare Festival appearing in *South Pacific*, *Amadeus* and *The Greenshow*. In summer 2014 she performed roles in *Star Spangled Girl* and *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* at the Neil Simon Festival. At SUU, Halie performed leading roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *An Ideal Husband* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

Collaborating with Sham on developing his vision are set designer **Brian Jude Beacom**, costume and hair and makeup designer **Ellen Osborne Kemp**, lighting designer **Andie Szekely** and sound designer **Ryan Turpin**. **Errin Gropp** serves as stage manager, with assistance from **Hannah Fontes** and **Kristine Norby**. Guest artist **Chris DuVal** is the show's fight choreographer.

In addition to Halie Merrill in the title role, the cast features **Trevor Messenger** (Ophelia), **Henry Ballesteros** (Polonius), **Selena Price** (Laertes), **Kade Cox** (Gertrude), **Amber James** (Horatio) and **Madison Ford** (Claudius). The cast also features **Tammi Colombo**, **Kaitlyn Curry**, **Brandon Grayson**, **Alex Grieg**, **Lauren Hoover**, **Joshua Hopkins**, **Michaela Kelly**, **Courtney McMullin**, **Abby Nakken**, **Madeline Peck**, **Justin Stockett**, **Robby Wilson** and **Cooper Wilt**.

Experience one of the world's greatest tragedies in a new realm. Ticket prices are: **\$10 Adult General Admission; \$8 Alumni with card; \$8, \$5 Student/Youth** and **free for Faculty/Staff** and **SUU students with a valid ID**. Faculty and staff are entitled to bring one guest. **The CPVA Flex Pass** offers six admissions to any theatre, dance or music event and can be used for a single entrance to a production or

can be used to admit six people to one event. The pass can be used in any multiples for CPVA ticketed events. The cost of the Flex Pass is **\$40** per pass. For tickets or the Flex Pass, call the SUU Ticket Office at (435) 586-7872, Mon-Fri, 8am-4:30pm, or purchase in person at the Centrum Arena box office. Single tickets may be purchased online at www.suu.edu/pva/arts.

The 2015-2016 Theatre Arts & Dance Series includes the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning musical ***Next to Normal***, the delightful ***Toyland: The Holiday Family Musical Treat***, the classic comedy ***You Can't Take It With You***, and Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning musical ***RENT***. The series also includes two dance concerts: ***Creative Variations: the Student-Choreographed Dance Concert*** and ***Elevated Movements: the Faculty-Choreographed Dance Concert***.

ABOUT THE COLLEGE

The **Southern Utah University College of Performing and Visual Arts** is comprised of nationally accredited departments of Art and Design, Music, Theatre Arts and Dance, as well as a graduate program in Arts Administration and a Center for Shakespeare Studies. The College offers 16 different degree areas, including liberal arts Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees; professional Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Fine Arts in art and theatre degrees; and a Master of Fine Arts in Arts Administration degree. More than 60 full- and part-time faculty and staff teach and mentor over 550 majors in the College. The College presents over 100 performances, presentations, and exhibitions each year. Affiliate organizations include Braithwaite Fine Arts Gallery, Utah Shakespeare Festival and SUU Ballroom Dance Company. For information about the College of Performing and Visual Arts, visit www.suu.edu/pva/arts.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS: *HAMLET*

- WHAT:** The prince of Denmark undergoes a unique transformation in SUU's Department of Theatre Arts & Dance's production of William Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Hamlet*. The title character will be played by a woman with gender reverse casting in other prominent roles. This innovative rendering of the classic will be the final production in the Adams Memorial Theatre.
- WHO:** Southern Utah University, College of Performing and Visual Arts, Theatre Arts & Dance Series
- WHEN:** Oct. 2, 5, 8, 9 & 10, 2015
- TIME:** 7:30pm
- WHERE:** Adams Memorial Theatre, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, UT
- TICKETS:** (435) 586-7872, Monday-Friday, 8am-4:30pm or visit: www.suu.edu/pva/arts
- PRICES:** General Adult Admission: \$10; Alumni with card: \$8; Student & Youth: \$5; SUU Faculty, Staff and Students: Free with valid I.D. CPVA Flex Passes \$40 each, good for six admissions