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Seeing Hamlet through Ophelia's eyes

Writer/director reimagines Shakespeare through five Ophelias

By Clare Croft

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To be Hamlet or Ophelia, that is the question. This weekend Tutto Theatre chooses the latter. The play "Ophelia," written and directed by Dustin Wills, opens tonight at the Blue Theatre. Wills collaged the play from his own writing and portions of "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet," "Midsummer Night's Dream," and other icons of Shakespeare. The result is a meditation on the character Ophelia, who is played in the show by five different actresses.

American-Statesman: Why did you choose to re-enter Hamlet through Ophelia?

Dustin Wills: The masculine point of view in history has been codified by a male point of view. So many historians in Western culture are old white men. So then the question is going back into "Hamlet" and thinking, "What if a woman had written this? What if a woman historian had written it? What if Ophelia had a voice? How would we rewrite it to fill in the gaps?"

Why five Ophelias?

Five I chose arbitrarily: four wasn't enough and six was too many. But why not just one? It was interesting to kind of find a way to convey the many levels in a person's mind: our logic and our reason and our this and our that. The Ophelias, in order, are in love, impassioned, on edge, undone, and in water. These aren't personality types per se, but they're the structural breakdown of her character throughout the show.

Why is Shakespeare compelling source material for you as a playwright and director?

The draw for me is that it really comes back to this idea of the power of language. In Shakespeare's time an actor could walk onstage and say, "I am in a forest," and the audience didn't need all that fancy design stuff to understand they were in a forest. It's the power of the imagination via language.

'Ophelia' opens Thursday, Nov. 6 and will be performed at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Sundays through Nov. 23 at the Blue Theatre, 916 Springdale Road. \$15-20 at door, \$12 advance. Thursdays are pay-what-you-can with a donation of a can of food. Tickets available at www.tuttotheatre.org.

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