



JOSEPH FUQUA:
'sweet prince'
Hamlet

By Julio Martinez

AS HE PREPARES FOR THE TITLE ROLE in one of the English language's most acclaimed and daunting stage works, Joseph Fuqua is incorporating as much source material as he can channel through his psyche. Of course it helps to have a working knowledge of the Bard. He recalls, "I played Octavius Caesar in *Antony and Cleopatra* at Actor's Theatre of Louisville and Iago in *Othello* for Dallas Shakespeare Festival. I must admit *Hamlet* is a bit more challenging."

As the fourth production of its 2006-2007 season, the Rubicon Theatre Company is showcasing Fuqua, who became the Company's first repertory member when the Rubicon established itself in 1998 as Ventura County's premiere non-profit professional theatre company. Directed by Jenny Sullivan, *Hamlet* also features a stellar supporting ensemble that includes Rubicon co-founder James O'Neil as Claudius, Stephanie Zimbalist as Gertrude and her father, noted film and stage actor Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. as The Player King. *Hamlet* runs through May 20.

"Before the official full cast rehearsals even began, Stephanie, James and I were working with Jenny," says Fuqua. "Actually, I had known about this production for about eight months before that. So, I had been reading as many books as possible. There is a marvelous book called *What Happens in Hamlet* by Cambridge professor J. Dover Wilson. It really has been a godsend. Rather than being told what the answers are, it has enabled me to ask the right questions.

"There are so many great books out there that feature the thoughts and musings of great actors, both well known and not so well known, that have played the part. I've read their commentaries on the soliloquies and the major scenes. Rather than watch performances, it has been great to read about what choice pools to drink from."

Fuqua has not shied away from the film versions of *Hamlet*. He found the Kenneth Branagh film very edifying. "I do love his work," he says. "Branagh had a point of view that he expressed in film that couldn't be done on a stage."

Fuqua quickly relates the Rubicon version of *Hamlet* won't approach the Branagh film's considerable length. "We are doing a cut version. Our dramaturge Bill Keeler has worked very hard on making a really concise *Hamlet*. He draws mostly from the First Folio, which was Shakespeare's acting edition. It is much shorter than the *Second Quarto*, which scholars say is the true *Hamlet*. Our version will run about two and a half hours, rather than four and a half.

"We're doing our show in the Empire period, early 19th century, which is an accessible period for the audience, the same period as Jane Austen's works. The costumes and sets are more modern, no dreary stonewalls and drapes to the floor. But swordplay is still in vogue. And for me, I don't have to wear tights."

Joseph Fuqua may not be wearing tights in this show but as a much sought after thespian, he has been adorned with a vast array of costumes and roles over the last 20 years since he graduated from the MFA program at Yale School of Drama. His Broadway and off-Broadway credits include *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *110 in the Shade* (Lincoln Center), *Raft of the Medusa* and *Yours, Anne*. His regional credits include Alexei in *A Month in the Country* at Arena Stage, Louis in *Angels in America* at Dallas Theatre Center and, last year, *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks* opposite Mary Jo Catlett at Ensemble Theatre in Santa Barbara.

LA audiences have seen Joseph in *The Cat's Meow* (Drama-Logue Award), *Very Truly Yours*, *On the Jump* at South Coast Rep and *All My Sons* at International City Theatre. He made his professional directorial debut with *J for J* (featuring Jenny Sullivan and the late John Ritter), presented by Rubicon Theatre Company and 11th Hour Productions at the Court Theatre.

Fuqua chuckles, "I think I have been in over 15 productions with the Rubicon Theatre Company. This is a phenomenal place to work. Everything is first rate. With this production, I am particularly impressed with the multi-level set design of Tom Giamario, who has been at the Rubicon as long as I have. He really knows the Rubicon stage and its limitations. It is about the same size as the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare's time. *Hamlet* fits perfectly at the Rubicon and I am as proud as I am in awe to be portraying this 'sweet prince'." ■

HAMLET

Continues Wed., 2 & 7 pm;
Thurs.-Fri., 8 pm;
Sat., 2 & 8 pm; Sun., 2 pm;
through May 20
Tickets: \$26-\$49
Rubicon Theatre Company
1006 E. Main St., Ventura
805.667.2900 or
www.rubicontheatre.org