



## Laughs Come Easily In Festival's Frothy, Frolicsome Comedy

### THEATER REVIEW - 'I Hate Hamlet'

January 22, 2002 | By Elizabeth Maupin, Sentinel Theater Critic

Gary Peter Lefkowitz is everybody's nightmare vision of a Hollywood producer -- gold neck chain, sunglasses, multiple rings flashing in the light. Gary doesn't see the point of theater, and when his best friend is set to play Hamlet in Central Park, Gary flies in from the coast to make him a better offer.

"TV," he says. "It's like art perfected. When you watch TV, you can eat."

Gary Peter Lefkowitz, a supporting player in the comedy *I Hate Hamlet*, is a trip in anybody's book. But in the Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival's telling, he's got a little something extra. Gary is played by Eric Hissom, most recently Petruchio in the festival's *Taming of the Shrew* and not long before that the title character in *Macbeth*. To see someone so well-versed in Shakespeare play Gary Peter Lefkowitz -- and play him to the hilt -- gives this show a layer of mischief nobody expects.

There's plenty of mischief already in *I Hate Hamlet*, an absurd little comedy that the Shakespeare festival has blown up to proportions of epic silliness. This is a show where everyone adds to the merriment, from the six accomplished actors to the composer who contributed a jingle for a fictitious snack called Trailburst Nuggets and the costume designer whose confections must be seen to be believed. And director Thomas Ouellette, a faculty member at Rollins [College](#), has brought it all together so that the show looks effortless -- an airy buffoonery that makes grown men snort.

Playwright Paul Rudnick, a comedy writer known as much for his movie scripts (*Addams Family Values*, *In & Out*) as his theater [work](#), drew on his own experience with *I Hate Hamlet*, which takes place in a Greenwich Village apartment that once belonged to John Barrymore, the greatest Hamlet of his generation.

The playwright once lived in this Gothic-styled apartment, and his conceit is that, when a young TV star named Andrew Rally moves in, the ghost of Barrymore returns to help him out. Andrew has been hired to play the gloomy prince in Central Park, but he's going into the role kicking and screaming. He hates Hamlet, he says; he'd rather be in California, and it doesn't help that his girlfriend Deidre is a determined virgin at 29.

Rudnick is an able jokester, and he has thrown together a grab bag of mismatched types -- the callow young actor, his ethereal girlfriend, a Teutonic old agent, a gushing Noo Yawk [real estate](#) saleswoman, the Hollywood producer and the grand old Barrymore himself, a matinee idol whose matinee has long since gone dark.

Still, the delights in this show are in what the festival has done with it. Rebecca Baygents has designed clothes that almost precede their wearers into the room: the Shakespearean costume for Deidre (Kelly Collins-Lintz) with Bjork-inspired three-dimensional doves all over it, the party dress for the real-estate agent Felicia (Suzanne O'Donnell) that looks like Christian Lacroix on speed.

O'Donnell, in a welcome return to the festival stage, is a stitch as the imbecilic Felicia: "Is it the real Hamlet or, like, the musical?" she asks. And Collins-Lintz, who also wrote the Trailburst Nuggets jingle, gives the earnest acting-student Deidre such elaborately literal gestures that she seems to perform in American Sign Language: She's Ophelia crossed with a drum majorette.

Richard Width makes a nicely callow Andrew, who flails against the indignities of his brief Hollywood career but trembles before the prospect of changing it, and Mary Baird avoids the sentiment in the aging Lillian, Andrew's German-accented agent. (Why Lillian is German is just one of the loose ends in Rudnick's sometimes careless script, which also may leave you wondering why actors get into costume in Greenwich Village for a show they're doing in Central Park.)