



Iron Age Theatre
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Shakesploitation
Iron Age Theatre
Philadelphia Premiere

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Iron Age Theatre brings a Hit from Chicago to the Fringe Festival

Shakespeare's plays have been done in a wide range of styles, but even the Bard would double take *Ninja Hamlet* or a *Grand Theft Othello*. Taking the very best, of popular music, film and video games then grafting them into the classic works of the Bard, author Andy Grigg created "Shakesploitation." Iron Age Theatre has brought this comic reworking of Shakespeare to the Philadelphia Fringe Festival.

Shakesploitation takes three classic Shakespeare plays and resents them in exploitation cinema. This hilarious parody of the Bard spoofs both Shakespeare's own texts and the very forms used for parody.

Presented by the Iron Age Theatre Company, "Shakesploitation" is making its Philadelphia Premier at the Fringe Festival. The show runs September 3, 4, 10, 14, 15 and 16 at the Journey Home Community Enrichment Center at 948 N 8th Street. Call the Fringe Box Office for tickets and information.

The play was originally produced in Chicago at New Millennium Theatre Company.

"I picked these particular plays primarily because they are the most recognizable to the general public. Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet, most people know the plot. With Othello, people know the basic themes. Beyond that, they all lent themselves so easily to parody. Othello made a perfectly natural Blaxploitation story and you can pretty much throw any style onto Romeo and Juliet (and most people have) and it works out," stated Grigg.

"What I like about these plays is that they take shots as such a variety of genres and ideas that anyone can find something to laugh at," stated John Doyle, Director of the Iron Age Theatre Fringe Production.

"I thought only theatre folk would be really into it, but it turned out that people just loved it. I think it had enough for everyone in the way of familiar parody and styles of humor. Some people liked the Hamlet speech because they realized it was a parody of the 'To be or not to be' bit, others because of the ridiculous way it's presented."

The play uses images, ideas and action from 1970s Kung Fu movies, Blaxploitation films, 80's power rock, horror movies, and video games like *Grand Theft Auto*, to drive the comedy. The mingling of the ageless stories of Shakespeare and the fickle trends of pop culture is the core of the comedy.



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“For Hamlet, my inspiration was less about a specific movie than that sort of weird foreign movie tone. That said however, I have to cite a great many White Lotus clan movies, Five Fingers of Destiny, Master of the Flying Guillotine, Kill Bill, and of course Invincible Obsessed Fighter from which I just stole things.” stated Grigg.

“I think people like making fun of Shakespeare. His plays are automatically associated with such a high cultural reverence, that I think part of the fun is seeing that reverence taken down a peg.” stated Grigg

Each scene takes a stab at Shakespeare but uses the conventions of the genre it is presenting to create levels of humor.

“It was fun watching the 'wave of realization' and ensuing laughter pass through the audience every night in the 'revenge theme' sequence from Ninja Hamlet. That's one of the things I love the most about the kind of theatre we do- building these expertly crafted in-jokes and watching the audience 'get it'.” Stated Chad Wise

The play uses video and projections as a backdrop for the scenes. “I really wanted to have the title sequence at the opening of Grand Theft Auto, recrafted with a touch of Shaft, because it was so hokey and really underlined the idea of 70s exploitation cinema.” Stated Grigg

The Iron Age Theatre production for the Philadelphia Fringe keeps all of the outrageous humor, sexiness, blood, bombast and, yes, even literature of the Chicago production and goes even further. “Our Philadelphia Fringe production has taken many of the threads Grigg created and upped the ante. We have included video throughout the play including a rock video of the Song “Rise Up” by Grigg and our band, which accompanies the obligatory training sequence in the play and a mini Shaw Brothers Kung Fu film to tell the story of King Hamlet’s death.

“New Millenium does pop-culture based theatre, everything from musical 'homag-odies' (homage/parodies) of movies like The Karate Kid & Evil Dead. Shakesploitation was a chance to tackle the Bard in an interesting, and unique.” stated Chad Wise of New Millennium Theater.

When I say the postcard for the shows Chicago premiere show I couldn’t help but contact the originators and read it. It matched my personal vision of theatre: classic, popular and intense with comedy to boot.” Stated Doyle “The play is really smart and that attracted me. It is also great to work of a full out comedic farce. Rehearsals are a long string of laughter from a talented cast.”

In “Grand Theft Othello” The moor and his youthful sidekick Tre battle “the man.” Othello is distracted from his mission by Desdemona’s imagined infidelity as the crooked cop Iago brings the Othello to his knees.

Romeo and Juliet rise from the dead, the day after their suicide to munch on their reconciled families in “Romeo and Juliet II: Apocalypse.”

Hamlet must train with the Shaolin master Phat Ho to defeat the unbeatable fighter technique of Claudius and avenge his father’s murder in the slightly dubbed martial arts extravaganza “Hamlet: Burning Fist of Denmark.” The noble prince is must overcome Ninja Rozencrantz and the blood thirsty and single-minded Fortinbras. The play is riddled with deadly duels and potent puns.

Iron Age Theatre is one of the most critically acclaimed companies working in the Philadelphia area. At last year’s Fringe Festival the company presented Howard Zinn’s brilliant, politically earth-



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shaking show “Marx in Soho.” Sold out at the Philadelphia Fringe, the play is currently on an extended National Tour, shaking up audiences across the country.

Iron Age has been a regular force at the Fringe, challenging audiences with plays like Amiri Baraka’s incendiary play about race relations “Dutchman” presented at the African American Museum and the “Interrogation of Nathan Hale.” The company has been nominated for Barrymore Awards for Outstanding Ensemble for “Terra Nova,” Outstanding Lead Actor in a drama for “The Elephant Man,” and recently produced The East Coast premier of the World War Two drama about female pilots “Sky Girls.”

The Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe run from September 2-17, 2005. Ticket can be purchased online beginning August 8 at www.livearts-fringe.org or after August 22 by calling 215.413.1318. Fringe guides which include dates, times, and venues for all performances for both festivals, will be available in the Philadelphia City Paper on August 25, 2005 and at all venues.

The Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe were originally founded in 1997 as the Philadelphia Fringe Festival. Today, the Live Arts Festival serves as a series of selected cutting-edge, boundary-breaking performing arts events, created by some of the most renowned contemporary artists from our region and around the world. The Fringe serves as a collective home for artists bringing their work to audiences in every conceivable form - in traditional and untraditional venues, using new artistic forms and established ones, breaking rules or refining them.

Tickets for the production will cost \$15. Information about “Shakesploitation,” as well as a wealth of dramaturgical and study support can be found at the Iron Age Theatre website at www.ironagetheatre.org.

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