

Hamlet | Sound Design Concept Statement

Plot

Prince Hamlet, a college student, has arrived home to his Kingdom of Elsinore in Denmark after the news that his Father, King Hamlet, has died. On top of this distressing news, Prince Hamlet's Uncle, Claudius has now married his Mother, Gertrude, and taken power over the kingdom. After he is convinced by the new King to remain in the kingdom instead of going back to school, Hamlet's friend Horatio says that he, and others, have seen a ghost that resembles the former king. Hamlet has to see this for himself. The Ghost arrives again and demands to speak to Hamlet alone. "The serpent that stung thee now wears his crown." He says, making Hamlet aware that Claudius in fact killed his father. Hamlet, as any person would be, is furious. He doesn't just want to kill Claudius, he needs to kill him and send him to hell to avenge the death of his father. So what does he do? He takes the local actors that are in the kingdom to stage a performance that is reminiscent of the horrid murder of King Hamlet in front of Claudius. During the performance, Claudius is so overcome with anger, he calls for lights and storms off. After the performance, Hamlet starts berating his own Mother over her new marriage to the beast that killed her former husband. He's yelling and screaming when a voice is heard hiding behind a tapestry, Hamlet stabs the spy thinking it is the king. To his dismay, it is the king's right hand man, Polonius. Hamlet is then on the verge of getting violent with his mother when suddenly to his eyes, the ghost appears and changes Hamlet's course to the real problem at hand, killing Claudius. After the death of Polonius, Claudius feels that Hamlet is a threat to both his life and his power. Polonius' son, Laertes, arrives and is convinced by Claudius to duel Hamlet with a poisoned foil in the hopes to kill him. The duel takes place, Hamlet kills Laertes with the poisoned foil after being stabbed. In his dying moments, Hamlet lunges and stabs King Claudius. If the poisoned stab wound isn't enough; he makes the dying king drink poison to ensure that his father's death is truly avenged. Then the rest is silence.

Concept & Themes

By setting this production of Hamlet in 2018, we can effectively bridge the actions in the play to that of our current political climate in the U.S. by using the current inhabitants of the White House as references for the characters in the play...

- Claudius: Donald Trump
- Gertrude: Melania Trump
- Polonius: Mike Pence
- Ophelia: Ivanka Trump
- Laertes: Jared Kushner
- Rosencrantz & Guildenstern: Secret Service assigned to protect the first family

- Hamlet: A future Barron Trump

This will not solve the stress our audience members feel about politics or the future of America. Rather, this old story will get them asking themselves “What can we do about this?” in a way that resonates in a modern context. There are many different themes in this play that will have different sound scores to immerse the audience into the world of Hamlet. These themes are: The Time Is Out Of Joint, Revenge, Anger, Unrequited Love, Supernatural, Regret, Spying, Despair, Fate and Scene Change Motifs.

The Role Of Sound

In our production of Hamlet, Sound will encapsulate the major thematic constructs of the play to effectively engulf the audience into Hamlet’s physical and emotional world. To do this, we have to explore each theme in depth to create an accompanying sound score. The breakdown of each theme is broken down from fastest to slowest pace :

The Time Is Out of Joint: A quote from Hamlet in Act 1 Scene 5 is our theme with the quickest pulse. This quote is Hamlets way of lamenting that the world is not right, that if time is not right, then nothing is working correctly. For our sake, it puts the audience in a position of anxious quickness like the world is spinning out of control by having a quick tempo, driving rhythm and fluctuations in color.

Revenge: This is a big theme. The play is following Hamlet as he seeks revenge for his father’s death. This will guide the audience along with Hamlet as he takes action towards his primary goal, like when he ultimately kills Claudius. It is quickly paced, but slower than the first theme.

Anger: Similar to Revenge, the theme of anger is a big theme and should be able to work in conjunction with other themes. It will be used in situations where characters are lashing out and can be used to amplify those moments. A good example is when Hamlet is reprimanding his Mother after the play he puts on. Heavy mass and thick colors really assert the weight of the scene.

Unrequited Love: Who better to write about Unrequited Love than Shakespeare? The pulse of this theme varies based on the character it’s most connected to, Ophelia. Ophelia is the character in the play who is simply looking for love with Hamlet who divulges to her that the feeling is not mutual. The theme can vary based on the swaying actions and emotions of her love.

Supernatural: An ambient theme to heighten the audience’s uneasiness through drawn out, almost tempo-less sound. Simply put by the director it is “A Ghost Theme.” And “Straight out of a horror movie”. The rhythm and tempo are almost too slow to recognize and the hollow colors and large space will make this ghostly theme put audience members on the edge of their seat.

Regret: Plain and simple, a rare theme only used to couple similar feelings of regret that few characters have in the play. Soft colors and little to no fluctuations in the mass of the pieces will create the emptiness and sadness tied to regret.

Spying: The spying theme is somewhat similar to the Supernatural theme in that it incites a feeling of uneasiness and a constant guessing. It's never predictable in its pattern or tempo and creates an eerie space similar to that of a surveillance room.

Despair: From the director "Underscores moments of overwhelming emotion" Such as the famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy. The natural heaviness of this theme is accompanied by softer colors whose slow tempo carries a lot of the weight.

Fate: This theme's roots are in the inevitable. It's a feeling that something is happening and nothing can stop it. A measurable pulse whose tempo is the slowest we experience in the show. Tied to moments in the show where the characters are slipping into what's arguably their predetermined destiny. An instance of this would be when Hamlet is in the graveyard and about to duel Laertes. He explains to Horatio, essentially, that all things come to an end, so why prolong the inevitable? This theme carries a more steady rhythm that drives the characters to the inevitable.

Scene Change Motif: Simply put, this is used to quickly power each scene into the next, not skipping a beat. Each one will not be drastically different, but they will vary based on what the play calls for. A spike in mass with thick, boisterous colors can really drive one scene into the next.