



# HAMLET

What to expect guide

Spring 2026

CORNWALL | BRADFORD | NORWICH | NOTTINGHAM |  
BLACKPOOL | NEWCASTLE | YORK | CANTERBURY

This guide is to help prepare visitors to  
*Hamlet*

This document contains useful information about your visit.

There may be some spoilers in here, but if you don't want to read the whole document you can skip to the bits you need to know by clicking on the subject below...

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## About this production

**Hamlet's mother has married his uncle, and at a less than decent interval since the death of his father.**

**As he pulls at the threads of his not-so-happy new family, Hamlet unravels a web of deceit and immorality that leads to the ultimate crisis of conscience.**

Our 'must-see' (Guardian) new production of *Hamlet* is heading to theatres around the UK on a major national tour in 2026, with Ralph Davis (*Film Club, House of the Dragon*) in the title role.

Following its critically acclaimed run in Stratford-upon-Avon, this 'scintillating new staging' (Financial Times) of Shakespeare's famous revenge drama will thrill audiences between February and April 2026, beginning at Hall for Cornwall and ending at the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury.

The stellar creative team is led by multi-award-winning director Rupert Goold, whose recent work includes *Dear England* (National Theatre) and *King Charles III* (Almeida Theatre).

[Tour Dates & Venues | Hamlet | Royal Shakespeare Company](#)

[Cast and Creative | Hamlet 2026 UK Tour | Royal Shakespeare Company](#)



## Useful to Know

We have relaxed performances of *Hamlet* on

Thursday 12 March 2026 2pm at Norwich Theatre Royal  
Thursday 19 March 2026 2pm at Nottingham Theatre Royal

We have chilled performances of *Hamlet* on

Wednesday 01 April 2026 7pm at Newcastle Theatre Royal  
Thursday 23 April 2026 2pm at Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury

These performances take a more casual approach to noise and movement in the auditorium.

The house lights may be slightly raised  
The performance itself is unchanged

This performance may be ideal for people who feel more at ease knowing they can go in and out of the auditorium during the show

If you need any further information or advice about how we can meet your access requirements, please contact the venue you are visiting



## Advice on Content

Live theatre is exciting. It can be loud, bright, shocking at times, and occasionally some of the effects we use, or the themes our productions explore, can trigger emotions.

We know that some of our audiences appreciate detailed information on the content of our shows to make informed decisions and to prepare themselves, or members of their party.

If there are specific themes you are concerned about, please contact the venue you are visiting.

***Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's Tragedy plays. In this version there are scenes of an adult nature including violence, death and the use of guns and swords.**

**There are also depictions of grief, loss and and deteriorating mental health'**

This production also features:

- Loud music and noise
- Flashing lights and strobe effects
- Haze used throughout
- Smoking of herbal cigarettes
- Stage blood and stage fighting
- Gun shots

**Running time is 2 hrs 40 mins**

**Part one is 1 hour 25 mins  
There is a 20-minute interval  
Part 2 is 55 minutes**



# Key Characters

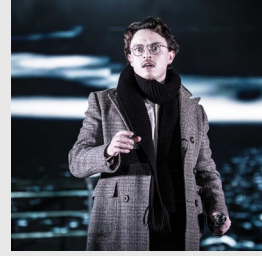
## HAMLET

Prince of Denmark



## HORATIO

Hamlet's friend and fellow student



## CLAUDIUS

King of Denmark & Hamlet's uncle



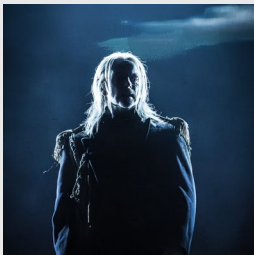
## GERTRUDE

Queen of Denmark & Hamlet's mother



## GHOST of old Hamlet

Former king of Denmark  
& Hamlet's father



## POLONIUS

Councillor to the state of  
Denmark



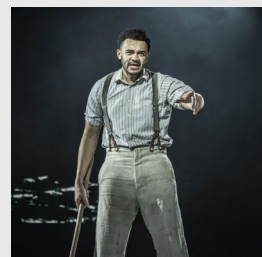
## OPHELIA

Polonius's daughter



## LAERTES

Polonius's son



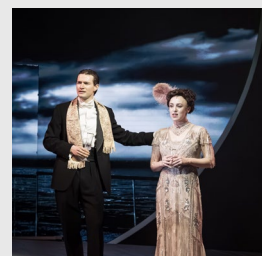
## THE PLAYERS

A travelling troop of performers



## ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN

Former schoolfellows of Hamlet



# Visual Story Guide to Hamlet

The grand ocean liner, The Elsinore, conducts a ceremonial burial at sea for the dead King Hamlet.

Black out  
Drums, Music, singing and trumpets  
A coffin is tipped into the sea  
4 x Gunshots Sound Effects



Fifty days later, night watchmen Barnardo and Francisco stand guard on the freezing deck. Horatio and Marcellus join them, and soon a ghostly figure, the dead King's apparition, emerges from the mist.

Ship's Horn  
Ghostly noises  
Flashing lights

Horatio is shaken and resolves to inform Prince Hamlet.

Laertes receives permission to return to France. Hamlet, still in deep mourning, spars verbally with Claudius and Gertrude.





Left alone, Hamlet laments his mother's quick remarriage.

Horatio and the guards arrive to tell Hamlet about the ghost, and he insists on watching the deck that night.



On the stern deck, Laertes prepares to leave the ship and warns Ophelia not to trust Hamlet's affection.



Polonius arrives and gives Laertes his famous list of advice. After Laertes leaves, Polonius questions Ophelia, forbids her from seeing Hamlet, and orders her to break off contact.



Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus wait. The Ghost appears again and beckons Hamlet to follow. Despite warnings that it might lead him to danger; Hamlet chooses to follow it into the darkness.



You may notice a gentle lilt of the ship as we see the ship has passed an Iceberg very closely.



Deep in the infernal engine room, the Ghost finally speaks: King Hamlet was murdered by Claudius, who poured poison into his ear. The Ghost demands revenge.

Ghost appears  
Loud knocking, bells clanging



Hamlet swears to remember, instructs Horatio and Marcellus to swear secrecy and hints he may adopt an “*antic disposition*”.

Faking madness to conceal his intentions and observe others without suspicion.

As water drips ominously in the ship’s bowels, the first hints of structural danger appear.

Ophelia finds Polonius and describes Hamlet entering her cabin in a distressed, dishevelled state, staring at her silently. Polonius concludes Hamlet is “mad for love” and rushes to report this to the King.



Claudius and Gertrude welcome Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom they’ve summoned to try to find out the cause of Hamlet’s behaviour.



Polonius presents his theory and reads Hamlet's letters to Ophelia. Hamlet toys with Polonius, (portrayal of madness)

Hamlet then interrogates his old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.



A troupe of shipboard entertainers arrives; Hamlet greets them warmly and asks for a particular piece to be performed.

After hearing a moving speech from the First Player, Hamlet decides to stage 'The Murder of Gonzago' with added lines to see if he can expose Claudius's guilt.



Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report failure in finding Hamlet's motives.

Claudius and Polonius set up Ophelia as bait while they eavesdrop.

Hamlet rejects Ophelia harshly.

After observing, Claudius decides Hamlet must be sent to England, fearing danger.



Hamlet prepares the actors, then the royal court arrives to watch the play. The performance of 'The Mousetrap' mirrors the murder of the late king, as described by the Ghost.





When the onstage poisoning occurs, Claudius panics and leaves abruptly — proof of guilt.

Red lighting  
Music, drums and vocals  
The players wear masks  
A photo flash as Horatio takes a picture of Claudius' guilt.  
Queen slaps Hamlet

Hamlet refuses to be manipulated by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and mocks their attempts to “play” him like an instrument.

As the ship subtly destabilises, he delivers “To be or not to be”. Hamlet has a gun, points it to his head and towards the audience, but it does not go off. The scene ends with a full blackout and ship sounds.



**There is a 20 minutes interval**



Claudius, consumed by guilt, tries to pray.

Hamlet enters and has an opportunity to kill him, but refrains, fearing Claudius would die in a state of grace.

He decides to confront his mother instead

Hamlet brings on his gun. It's not fired



Hamlet confronts the Queen fiercely, accusing her of corruption.

Polonius sends a cry from off stage, and Hamlet, thinking it is Claudius, fires several shots and kills him.

The Ghost appears to Hamlet, unseen by Gertrude, reminding him of his purpose.

Hamlet forces Gertrude to acknowledge her wrongdoing, then drags Polonius' body away.



Hamlet is violent towards Gertrude  
Hamlet fires 3 shots from the gun.  
Stage blood

Claudius hears the Queen's account and sends Hamlet to England immediately.

In the ship's engine room, Hamlet refuses to reveal where he has hidden Polonius' body.

He mocks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for being "sponges". Claudius enters and declares Hamlet must sail to England. Unknown to Hamlet, Claudius sends a secret order for Hamlet's execution



On a chaotic, listing deck, passengers scramble for lifeboats as alarms sound. Guards attempt to escort Hamlet aboard in handcuffs, but there is a frenzy of panicking passengers as the ship sways.

The guards point a gun at Hamlet. It's not fired.





Ophelia sings fractured songs. She is grief stricken.

Ophelia displays deteriorating mental health through her erratic behaviour

Laertes storms the King's cabin with an axe, threatening Claudius and demanding answers about his father's death.

Claudius manipulates him toward revenge against Hamlet, who has managed to escape his voyage to England.

Their plotting is interrupted when Gertrude returns with the devastating news that Ophelia has drowned, having slipped from the bow of the ship



On a now severely tilting deck, preparations for Ophelia's sea-burial take place.

Hamlet and Horatio arrive mid-conversation about Hamlet's discovery letter outlining the plot to kill him and how he rewrote it to doom Rosencrantz and Guildenstern instead.



A gravedigger-like orderly presents a skull (Yorick), inspiring Hamlet's meditation on mortality.





The funeral arrives; Gertrude mourns Ophelia as though she had hoped she'd be Hamlet's wife.

Laertes and Hamlet clash violently in their grief.

The Ship Rocks  
Thunderous rumbles

Claudius proposes a reconciliatory duel between Hamlet and Laertes, secretly preparing a sharpened, poisoned blade and a poisoned cup.

As the duel unfolds, the ship floods.

Gertrude accidentally drinks the poisoned wine.

Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned blade; they switch swords, and Hamlet wounds him back.



Stage fighting with swords  
Loud ship noises as it continues to sink

Laertes confesses the plot, implicating Claudius, whom Hamlet then kills.



As the ship sinks beneath them, bodies and furniture sliding away, Hamlet dies in Horatio's arms. Horatio mourns him in the freezing water.

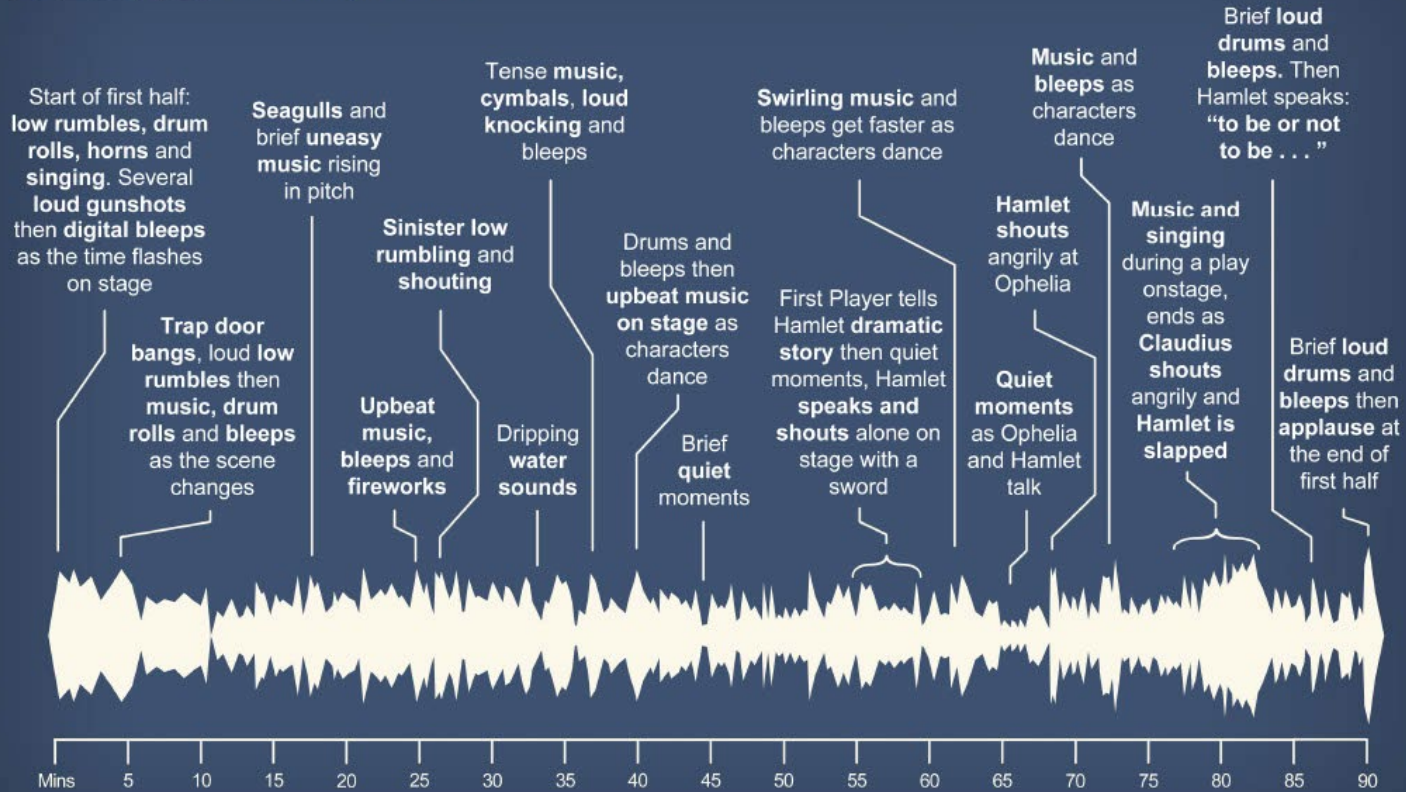
Stage goes to blackout

**The End**



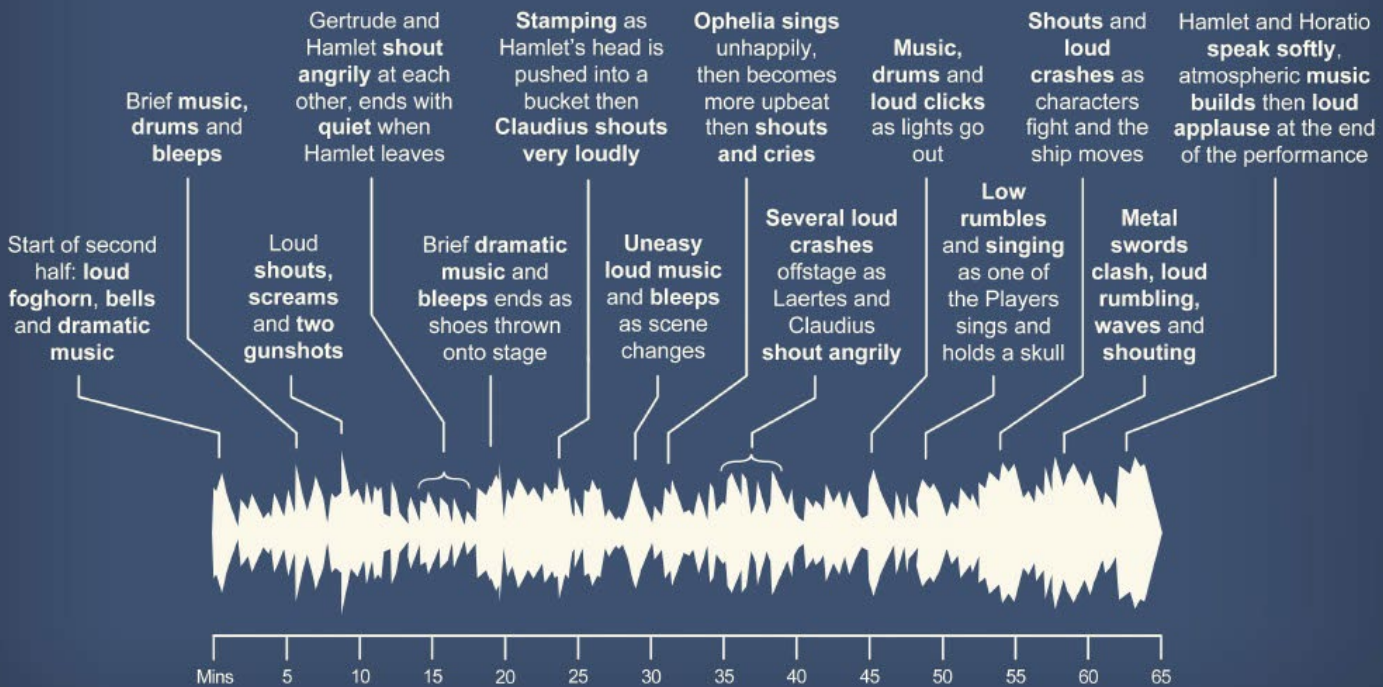
# The Sonic Story

## RSC Hamlet Sonic Story - First Half



This graphic tells the 'Sonic Story' of *Hamlet*. It highlights loud and quiet moments from the performance and moments when the sound changes suddenly.

## RSC Hamlet Sonic Story - Second Half



Sonic story  
designed by  
Touretteshero  
CIC, 2025



## Useful links

[Click here for more information about Hamlet](#)

[Click here to listen to the Hamlet Audio Introduction](#)

[Learning | Hamlet | Royal Shakespeare Company](#)

You can watch the

[Hamlet plot synopsis film](#)

with images, audio, captions and BSL

And look behind the scenes here:

[Introducing Ralph Davis as Hamlet](#)

**We hope you enjoy the performance**

**Thank you**

