

By Julie McHale

"Dancing with Hamlet" runs through March 24 with 8:00 performances on Thursday through Saturday at the Brumder Mansion on 3046 West Wisconsin Avenue in Milwaukee. Call 414-332-3963 or visit their website at windfalltheatre.com

Many of Shakespeare's tragedies mirror the turmoil in a family. Local playwright Deanna Strasse parallels the Flack family to Hamlet's and the animosity that transpires when Hamlet's mother marries his uncle soon after his father's death. How dare she!

Rosie Flack, recently divorced from her children's father, is planning a marriage to Tony Simms. Her ex-husband unexpectedly just died in a car accident, and her children – Beau, Wilde and Elvira – not only strongly disapprove of her upcoming wedding plans but also to its celebration so soon after their Dad's untimely death.

They have all come home to hash out the ensuing events – the strange juxtaposition of the arrival of the cremation urn and the planned festivities that are on the horizon. The five characters that tell the story include a close friend and neighbor of the Flack family. It is an unforgettable and potentially explosive mix of personalities.

The structure of the play involves occasional excerpts from Shakespeare's work itself along with some quotations alluded to from "Hamlet" by Elvira, who happens to be an English professor. Elvira also serves as a narrator at times. Shakespeare's frequent use of "asides" is employed here.

The work itself seems a bit disjointed in spots, but it's such an interesting concept, that one can overlook that for all the pluses the script contains.

All six characters are well drawn, and the tension that can arise at "family reunions," especially when big changes are involved, is palpable and very credible. I've often heard it said that adult children are frequently resentful if a parent moves on with their life after a divorce or death. All sorts of grudges and old family hurts get unearthed.

The acting on the part of all the characters is stunning. Cory Jefferson Hagen is the family peacemaker and voice of reason as the oldest son Beau. Josh Scheibe, as the family rebel Wilde, stirs things up, determined to sabotage his mother's plans; Melody Lopac, the complex, conflicted daughter Elvira, like Hamlet, ruminates a lot; Donna Daniels, as the tempestuous Rosie, renders her as strong, demanding and easily unglued; her partner-to-be Tony Simms, beautifully rendered by Emmit Morgans, is multi-dimensional, showing different sides of himself depending on his audience; and lastly, Amanda J. Hull, the kindly, concerned neighbor, is probably the most stable character in the whole bunch. The touching scene between her and Tony is one of the most revealing and surprising scenes in the entire play.

It was fascinating to watch things unfold in the few days we spent with this family. Will anything get resolved in a fashion that satisfies everyone, or anyone, for that matter? Stay tuned.

Well directed by Carol Zippel of Windfall Theatre who is using Brumder's intimate space for this production. It is a perfect fit on all counts. Well-designed set by Amanda J. Hull as well.