

The New York Times

Arts

Spare Times

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Published: March 4, 2010

OPEN REHEARSALS FOR ‘HAMLET’



If you happen to be walking through the World Financial Center in Lower Manhattan this weekend, or anytime in the next several weeks, be aware that a swordfight may erupt near you. If so, do not panic; you are actually seeing actors from the New York Classical Theater production of “Hamlet,” starring Justin Blanchard (“Journey’s End”) in the title role (above with Ginny Myers), who will be rehearsing at the 3.5-acre center through March 25.

“The process of how it gets done is as exciting as just seeing it,” said Stephen Burdman, the company’s artistic director, describing one goal of the open rehearsals his company has used for years in productions in Central Park and Battery Park. The hope is that passers-by will be intrigued by what they see and return for the full production next month.

The theater company seems to be a natural fit at the center, where Debra Simon, the artistic director of the organization arts>World Financial Center, shares Mr. Burdman’s enthusiasm about allowing the public to “peek behind the curtain” in the free

programs she creates in theater, film, music, dance and more.

In addition to presenting “Hamlet,” Ms. Simon has given the company a residency for its entire 2010 season, which will include “Richard III” and “Much Ado About Nothing” in Central Park and Battery Park this summer.

Throughout the season, the company will use an empty storefront at 1 New York Plaza as a production office and costume shop. “All the stuff that usually happens behind closed doors will be open,” Mr. Burdman said. Passers-by can wander into the office and observe costume fittings, take part in scheduled discussions with members of the creative staff and even — if they are so inclined — learn about more mundane aspects of putting on a show, like sending out mailers and doing paperwork.

The most exciting part, though, is likely to be the rehearsals and performances of “Hamlet.” “It’s a two-hour version with no intermission, and it’s very action-packed,” said Mr. Burdman, who is directing the play. Audiences will be able to get in on the action to some extent by following the show as it moves around the center. “Wear comfortable shoes,” Mr. Burdman said. “We’ve got seven flights of stairs.” (Open rehearsals through March 25 at various times; performances April 1-18, World Financial Center, West Street, south of Vesey Street, Lower Manhattan; daily schedules at (212) 945-0505, newyorkclassical.org or artsworldfinancialcenter.com; free.)