

Copyright 2003
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Lisa (Labosky) Schleipfer

Hamlet has entered a new era. The GEAR UP tour of *The Time is Out of Joint*, a one act adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, recently toured throughout the Southeastern Oklahoma Enterprise GEAR UP Partnership.

GEAR UP students from Bryan, Choctaw and McCurtain counties attended the performance thanks to a collaboration between the Southeastern Oklahoma Enterprise GEAR UP Partnership and the SOSU Theatre Department.

The adaptation of *Hamlet* was written by former SOSU Theatre Department head Molly Risso. The one act play focuses on the major events from the Shakespeare original that lead Hamlet and those around him to their tragic ends. This production was designed, acted, and directed entirely by students from Southeastern's Theatre Department.

The overall look of *The Time is Out of Joint* cast aside any preconceived ideals about Shakespearean style. The set for the show was raw and industrial, actors having to enter the stage through plastic tarps and torn fencing. The performers were dressed in black and trench coats, adorned only by accessories such as a scarf or hat to connote a character change.

Even the ghost of King Hamlet, played by Jeremie Cook, took on technological advances. The ghostly apparition appeared onto part of the plastic backdrop of the set, a combination of a live camera and projector backstage.

"We knew that traveling with this show would give us limited special effects," said Nicole Cook, Director of *The Time is Out of Joint*, and Co-Coordinator for the GEAR UP tour, "But this was an interesting way to portray a ghost on stage."

Students' reacted to the non-traditional look and feel of the production. When students asked, "Why was Hamlet wearing a leather jacket?" Eddy Karch (Hamlet) replied, "If I had come out wearing tights and a poofy shirt, would you have taken me seriously?"

"We knew this would probably be the first exposure these students had to Shakespeare," Cook said, "So we tried to give them something they weren't expecting."

After the performance, the GEAR UP students attended three mini-workshops. Mark McClanahan and Emmy Gladney, co-fight choreographers for the show, gave an interactive demonstration on sword fighting. Students had the opportunity to learn basic stances and fencing moves, and to duel with one another.

A second workshop introduced students to Shakespearean language, and volunteers had a verbal bout as they learned playful insults in the traditional language. Teachers too, were invited to take the stage for a chance to exchange barbs. The duels were won based on audience applause.

The third workshop allowed students to ask questions of the performers about Hamlet, Shakespeare and careers in the performing arts field.

"We wanted to give the students something this time that really immersed them in the Shakespearean language and culture," said Cook. "This tour was unique because we wanted to capture Shakespeare in a way that the students could really respond to."

"I am really impressed with what this cast and crew has done for us this show," said Lisa Labosky, VISTA member for the GEAR UP Partnership, and Co-Coordinator of the

theatre tour. “They really helped in directing every aspect of this program towards our 7th and 8th grade students.”

Teachers across the GEAR UP Partnership were given a guide to Shakespeare and the *Hamlet* play, to introduce their students to the language and concepts of the drama. “It was different this time around,” said Tracy Whitaker, GEAR UP Language Arts Coach for Calera Schools. “Because I had the information to present to the students before they saw the show, they were extremely excited to see what we had talked about in class.”

One seventh grade student was skeptical about being able to understand the complicated language and plot of the play. After the show, she told one GEAR UP staff member, “That was really good! I am so glad that we came.”

“We at GEAR UP are very please with the magnitude of the theatre program,” said Rudy Manley, Director of the GEAR UP Partnership. “This has been a unique opportunity to expose our students to the performing arts.”

The idea to take theatrical performances on the road came about when Bryan County students who took part in a math and science summer camp this past June and July, were offered a field trip to the SOSU Shakespearean Festival.