

Hamlet Opera WS 3

If you were an actor, would you like to play Hamlet? Would you like to play any other part in the play?

What version of *Hamlet* does Brett Dean use in the opera? What is the difference between that one and the well-known one?



Maxine Peake as Hamlet



* In this WS, excerpts from The New Yorker magazine review intermingle with clips from the Aria Code podcast.

1. Listen to the clip.

What do you think the phrase “*there’s the rub*” means?
Listen again and read the transcript this time. Did you guess right?

“To die, to sleep no more and by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. ‘Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished to die, to sleep, to sleep perchance to dream. Aye, there’s the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil must give us pause.”

2. Listen to the clip and join the matching parts

the pain that

abstract chord

tuned

soup

a sort of really

he currently feels

high floaty, ethereal

otherworldly noise

a brain

gongs

this sort of

violin sound



Listen again and fill the gaps with verb forms

He's in so much pain that he _____ that death, nothingness, would be better than the pain that he currently feels.

Then you have these _____ gongs all _____ around this sort of same chord that _____ a piece that will _____ the piece that you _____ .



It's like a Hamlet theme, and it's a sort of really abstract chord. And you have stones _____ and _____ as well. "Is that all to be, or not to be? No, to sleep, to dream." There's another click. "Ay there's the point to sleep to dream." And when you _____ during the second time you suddenly have, the strings, these really high floaty, ethereal, violin sound stopped to come in and it's like a sort of, um, I don't know, like a brain soup, you know, he's sort of _____ around in this, this sort of otherworldly noise.

3. Listen to this snippet and complete the captions under each picture

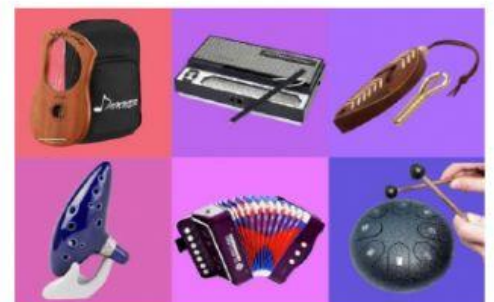
Dean, an Australian who played viola in the Berlin Philharmonic before turning to composition full time, has total command of the orchestra. He can generate hyper-complex, borderline-chaotic textures that remain cleanly etched in every detail.



various _____



raiding the _____



strange _____

The soundscapes of "Hamlet" are a multifaceted wonder, incorporating abyssal electronic tones, instrumental stations in the balconies, an onstage accordion, and every extended technique in the modern-music textbook.





4. Listen to the clip and order the lines _____

___ “But for this, but for the joyful hope of this.”

___ But then he pauses and considers, “but what if death might not be the end of being?” There might be a state of being after death that is even more painful than the one he's experiencing in life.

___ And then you get this really low, dirty, cello noise coming in.

___ He talks about the undiscovered country, which is so famous that *Star Trek* used it. He's talking about going places that we don't know about. He's talking about the afterlife, he's talking about heaven and hell.

___ It becomes this tremendously expansive line.

___ Ophelia is generally on stage during the speech reading or pretending to read.

___ All in all, in this opera the character of Ophelia is given a lot more agency and a lot more substance.

___ Sometimes in the play, it seems as if she's just so peripheral to him. But Matthew and Brett bring her into the scene of Hamlet's “To be, or not to be” monologue, to show how much she is weighing on his conscience.

___ And that's when you first hear Ophelia,

5. Go through the noun phrases, then try to find the correct place for each one in the transcript.

his existential angst

suicidal depression

her mind

suicide contagion

one of the sides

a romantic relationship

her former lover

It's so easy to forget that Ophelia is onstage while Hamlet is delivering “to be, or not to be.” So often Ophelia, if she's even

remained onstage is way off on _____ and it's sort of spotlight down on Hamlet

and _____. And I think what Brett Dean really captures is the way that we need to

remember that Ophelia is there with Hamlet. And not only are we hearing these words, but she

is hearing these words.



She hears Hamlet who she's been in _____ with. And they're having a tough time. They're going through a breakup. And it's not really clear to her why. She sees _____ expressing these suicidal thoughts. And that kind of plants an idea in _____. And then you see Ophelia enter into the realm of Hamlet's melancholy and _____ in the second half of the play. And to me, there's a moment of _____ that happens there.



Listen and check _____

It's an absorbing spectacle, but ultimately an insubstantial one. The dismantling of most of Hamlet's soliloquies obscures his inner world, without which the bloodbath at Elsinore loses interest. In place of the dreamer-philosopher Hamlet, we get an ill-tempered cutup, a tragic brat.

6. Use the prompts in brackets to fill the gaps.

Suicide _____ (*contagious*) is a term social _____ (*psychology*) use to talk about the ways that when suicide or suicidal ideas are kind of in the air, if there's a case or there's media reports on a case that that can increase the _____ (*prevalent*) of suicide or suicide ideas.

So this is why there are media guidelines related to discussing suicide that, you know, don't describe in

detail, don't _____ (*romantic*) the manner of death, make sure that you provide resources. So it kind of rattles me a little bit that the most famous soliloquy and the most famous play by the most famous English playwright is all about suicide. And we _____ (*assignment*) that in high schools every year. You know, what are the chances that every student is _____ (*mentality*) in a place where it's gonna be _____ (*produce*) and healthy for them to _____ (*engagement*) with those kinds of thoughts and ideas. But I also think that it can be, you know, an opportunity for us to talk about the concept of suicide contagion, a kind of mechanism by which we might start some conversations.

Listen and check _____



The staging rarely lets the hero stand still: he paces, he slouches, he holds up bunny-ear fingers behind Polonius's head, he mincingly mocks the foppish Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

7. Listen and complete the phrases with one word in each gap _____

1. the tuned gongs that you _____ this aria _____
2. the _____ duet
3. to remember him and to pray for his _____ as well
4. I have _____ of yours that I've longed to _____
5. she _____ him _____ these, these love letters
6. then just _____ them _____ the floor and says
7. becomes wise to the fact that he's being _____
8. he becomes _____ and violent and _____ toward Ophelia



The women, meanwhile, are reduced to modish caricature: Gertrude assumes arch poses, while Ophelia lurches from pitiful fretting to orgasmic writhing.

8. Listen to the clip once. What do Shakespearean scholars think a nunnery in the play means?

Listen again and put the lines in order

___ she just simply doesn't understand why he's become so unhinged and why he doesn't seem to love her anymore.

___ So it's not that he's saying you're so pure that you should go be a nun, but that you're damaged goods. So I'm not interested anymore.



___ And here we have the, the sort of the, the breakdown, not only of the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, but the beginning of her mental breakdown

___ Ophelia is just beyond words, she just can't handle it. So she starts making all these high skittery sounds when Hamlet is sort of cursing her out.

___ And it's thought by Shakespearean scholars that a nunnery meant, actually, a whorehouse.

___ And this is where he very famously says to her, "Get thee to a nunnery."

Find in the transcript above and type in a loose manner four things (words, phrases etc.) describing/related to each of the two characters and to their states:

Ophelia

Hamlet

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

Watch the scene from the 2017 production by **Robert Icke**.
What are the first three things Hamlet accuses himself of?

Allan Clayton, a pungently eloquent tenor, thrives on the assignment. But the japery is so relentless that I found myself sympathizing more than once with Claudius, whom Rod Gilfry embodies in seedily charismatic style.

9. Listen to the snippet and read the transcript _____.

Ask questions for the “answers” in bold.

CLAYTON: I mean, I guess you could call it, you could call it **ghosting**, but it's ghosting to the nth degree. It's, it's actually horrendous. He denies their love was ever real when it was, and it's, it's, it's such self-sabotage and self-hurt, but ultimately it's **because he knows the journey he's taking** and he knows he can do only that **alone**. And certainly not with her at his side.



ELLISON: You know, Hamlet is always marked out as the guy who just can't quite get himself to take the revenge. And when he finally does it sort of backfires **spectacularly**.

WEST: And **as soon as he does the deed**, you know, there's another 200 lines of the greatest thing Shakespeare ever wrote. And then you sit down at 10 o'clock for an hour of fighting and corpses.



CLAYTON: Laertes and Claudius have planned to kill Hamlet **with a poisoned sword**. Hamlet knows exactly what's going on and he grabs a sword and basically kills everyone.

He dies as well.

ELLISON: And that's *Hamlet* in a nutshell.

10 Unjumble the sentences and questions

And if you wanted a précis of it, which is very hard to put in any other words, they're pretty simple words "to be, or not to be." Life is terrible.



/my/I've / father /lost/. _____

/I/ trust/ my/ can't/ mother/. _____

/ and therefore/ the same brush/my girlfriend/ tainted with/ is a woman/.

/ myself/ I/why/ kill / don't/? _____

/ is unknown/ because I'm/ because the afterlife/ a coward,/.

/ yourself,/ why/ don't/ sir/ kill / you /? _____

/ anyway/you're/ die/ going to/. _____

/ do/the brave/why/ you/ thing/ don't /? _____



Because you're a coward. Thank you very much. Yes. Okay. Now we can carry on with the play.

/you know,/ as bad / can absolutely/ as they/ be/ things are absolutely/.

Let's go on. And that's it, that's the epitome of Western drama!

Listen to Samuel West and check yourself _____

11. Shadow the lines.

1. _____ Shakespeare's longest play. 400 years and still going strong.



2. _____ And even if you know just that one line, chances are, you've picked up bits of the story by osmosis: something's rotten, it's in Denmark, Prince Hamlet wants to kill his uncle, Claudius, because Claudius *murdered* Hamlet's father and then *married* his mother.



3. _____ Hamlet stalls, plays detective, contemplates suicide, breaks up with his girlfriend, and then dies along with pretty much everyone else.

4. _____ It's such an unhappy story. But people freakin' love it. It's been played by some of the greatest actors of stage and screen, and it's been adapted into a few operas.

5. _____ He's in so much pain that he thinks that death, nothingness, would be better than the pain that he currently feels.

6. _____ You know, you can't sit back and go, "This bit doesn't apply to me." Yes mate, it does. It's about death."

7. _____ You know, it's an existential howl into the void. And that's why it's relevant, and that's why it's all-consuming: because it makes you question life and death, and that's the biggest thing of all.



8. _____ You asked me who Hamlet is. I mean, he's all of us in difficulty. The question is how do we live truthfully in a world, which doesn't require us to.

9. _____ The speech certainly is much better at asking questions than answering them. But perhaps that uncertainty is part of the reason for its fame.

10. _____ If it was a more straightforward speech, if it was more personal to Hamlet, if it made more sense, I suspect we wouldn't still be talking about it.

