



Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead **Review by Norm Gross**

Now at the Durrell Theatre in the YMCA in Cambridge, Mass., Bad Habit Productions is staging their presentation of "Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead" by Tom Stoppard. A popular success in both London and New York upon its debut in 1968, it was later also produced as a major motion picture in 1990 and has been a favorite with many theatrical companies here and abroad ever since. An engagingly clever and satirical spin on Shakespeare's most celebrated drama "Hamlet," its' focus is not on the Bard's famed and despondent Danish Prince, but rather on two of the original play's least significant participants. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two of Hamlet's former school mates who have been called by Hamlet's uncle, the new King Claudius, to help comfort their old school chum. Hamlet knows that his uncle has assumed the throne by first murdering his father, and then by marrying Gertrude, his mother. He plans to entrap King Claudius by having a troupe of travelling actors perform a play with a plot-line much like that of his father's assassination. Stoppard's twist on these events begins with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on their way to the castle residence of Hamlet and his murderous uncle and mother. Along the way, they encounter the band of aforementioned actors who are also on their journey to the castle. The leader of this rag-tag band of performers is a loquacious blowhard, known as "the player." Neither he, nor Alfred, the traveling ensembles' completely befuddled major actor and the play's prime twosome truly comprehend, in any manner, the reasons or even the circumstance they all find themselves in! Challenging one another with mind blowing cascades of witty and stimulating speculations,

puns and elaborate word games about their past and present they ultimately remain as confused and uninformed as ever. Following the course of Shakespeare's original, Act II finds Hamlet, sent by sea to England by his perfidious uncle, accompanied by his two old friends. As foretold, Hamlet is able to elude his Uncle's murderous intent, while as expected Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not as fortunate! Obviously greatly influenced by Samuel Beckett, here too, Stoppard's two travelers similarly resemble the great Irish playwright's Vladimir Estragon as they also wait expectantly. Extremely well-acted on a relatively bare stage by Jonathon Overby as Rosencrantz and Stephen Libby as Guildenstern, with solid support from Dennis Hurley as the player and Ryan Douglas as Alfred. Kudos must also go to Silas Jenzen Lohrenz as Hamlet, and Daniel Schuettinger and Karen Maloney as his Uncle Claudius and his wife/mother Gertrude, all under Steve Kleinedler's strong and assured direction. This highly engaging and provocative production is now playing through August 9, 2009.

My grade: 5 out of 5