



THE SCOTSMAN

Theatre review: **The Man Who Was Hamlet**

By **TIM CORNWELL**, Published: 19/8/2010



Rising from the grave after Hamlet's death scene, George Dillon draws the audience into an absorbing and thought-provoking one-man show. He takes one of the world's oldest literary mysteries and turns it into an Elizabethan drama. Shakespeare scholars may shake their heads, but the evening's a romp, and a clever one.

The simply-staged show is in the award-winning, relaunched Hill Street Theatre - a welcome newcomer on this year's Fringe, committed to quality theatre in all shapes and sizes, with former Aurora Nova manager Tim Hawkins as its venue director. Like Hawkins, Dillon is a notable Fringe player, in his 14th year, with award-winning productions like Graft - Tales of an Actor, under his belt.

Dillon's central character is Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, swashbuckling swordsman and seaman, poet and theatre patron, noble and flirtatious courtier of Queen Elizabeth I, whom he plays

from childhood to his mysterious withdrawal from public life.

He segues nicely back and forth into others along the way, particularly the Queen herself, regally wrangling with de Vere all the way from her bedchamber to the Tower.

We begin with the earl as a 12-year-old, struggling with a torrid emotional response to the death of his father and the rapid remarriage of his mother, where Dillon begins to introduce the idea that de Vere's life was an inspiration for Hamlet. With it he reminds us that Hamlet's story is not some distant drama of Denmark but a universal human conundrum.

It's a leap from there to a much bigger conceit, which I won't spoil. But one of the evening's most amusing moments is the encounter between de Vere and a bald-headed bumpkin who like himself, is named William, with a wife called Anne.