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□by Andrew White June 23 <http://www.broadwayworld.com/washington-dc/article/BWW-Reviews-A-Stunning-Moving-ENTER-OPHELIA-DISTRACTED-from-Taffety-Punk-20140623#.U6ITF41dXCq>



Taffety Punk's unique blend of music, theatre and dance needs no introduction to local artists, and they have earned a devoted following with their work over the years. Their current experimental production, [Kimberly Gilbert](#)'s re-imagining of Shakespeare's most famous sacrificial victim, is a chance for new audiences to appreciate the heart of Taffety's mission.

A fascinating blend of dance, monologue, dialogue, lights, sound effects and live music, *Enter Ophelia, distracted* gives us a piercingly perceptive look into the psyche of the

young girl fated to lose first the love of her life, then her father, her mind, and then her life. There's a reason why Ophelia's fictional fate resonates so strongly with women to this day, and Gilbert-with the help of Choreographer Erin [F. Mitchell](#)-has plumbed her depths in ways that are intensely personal and, for this critic, unforgettable. The intimate confines of the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop fairly burst with the passions unleashed in this piece.

The show takes its title from Shakespeare's stage directions for Act IV, Scene 5 of *Hamlet*, the word "distracted" a subtle indication that she has gone mad. Because Ophelia says so little in the play, and because *Hamlet* focuses so much on that Danish guy (you know, the one who hems and haws all the time?), audiences can only speculate on her journey and the reasons for her famous crack-up.

Gilbert has taken carefully-selected scenes and elements from the play, refracting them through the lens of an innocent girl imprisoned by the words of all the men in her life-her brother Laertes, her father Polonius, and of course her boyfriend Prince Hamlet. No men need appear on-stage for their ominous presence to be felt; instead Gilbert is joined by an ensemble of dancer/actors-Eleni Grove, [Katie Murphy](#), and Erin White-who share in Ophelia's journey.

The movements of the ensemble reflect the trajectory of Ophelia's fate, beginning with the carefree teen, light on her feet and transitioning, by degrees, through the worry, the paranoia, the panic and finally the splintering and shattering of her personality. The concept in some way recalls Joe Banno's production of *Hamlet* at the Folger some years ago, when four performers took on the title role. The results here in Gilbert's concept are more successful, to my mind, because she has wisely narrowed our focus to a single tragic character.

Perhaps the most powerful scene in this production comes with Gilbert's treatment of the "play within the play" scene, when Ophelia is forced to endure her ex-boyfriend's rudeness and contempt in front of the entire Danish court. Our four performers sit on the floor facing the audience, bathed in an intimidatingly white-hot light provided by designer [Chris Curtis](#). Each of the four reflects the colossal weight of

expectations placed upon the young girl's shoulders, and each break under the pressure in unique but telling ways, revealing the rush of thoughts and feelings she must have felt.

Composer Amy Domingues accompanies the cast with a live cello, and she cues and drives the action with her own work, augmented by electronic reverb as well as the natural overtones the instrument offers. With everything from eerie tonal effects to snatches of old Renaissance tunes, accompanied briefly by sound effects designed by [Marcus Kyd](#), Domingues' music enhances the intense emotional content of the piece.

One of Taffety Punk's concepts is to treat an evening at their theatre like a night at a typical punk bar, with one act following another. As Kyd (the Artistic Director) noted before the show, it's one of the ways they have of blending their love for the classics with the punk sensibility that people of a certain age grew up with, and are trying to pass down to the next generation of artists. On the night I attended, Stephen Clapp opened the show with excerpts from his new piece, *Windswept*, which is currently in development and slated to appear in a full-length version at Dance Place later this year.

Inspired by texts from speeches and papers on Climate Change, with "Windswept" Clapp recites key passages from his sources and both accompanies and comments upon them through his unique, sinewy style of movement. In movement terms, Clapp offered a sort of 'theme and variations,' with characteristic gestures that seemed to symbolize the way we are trapped by our current economic habits and how urgently we need to break free of them, to save ourselves and our environment. Climate change skeptics may not be persuaded by the rhetoric, but his way of thinking through the body about the issues involved is fascinating to watch. Clapp reminds us that reason can only take us so far and that with dance it is more important to think with the body.

When (not if, but when) you come to see Taffety Punk at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop, be sure to give yourself extra time to find parking, which is always scarce in the evening. Stick to the parking spaces in "green" zones, because even if you show up early (as I did) you'll still have 2 hours to enjoy the show and get back to your car with time to spare. Otherwise, check out the paid parking lot at 8th and I Sts. SE.

Production Photo, from Left to Right: [Kimberly Gilbert](#), Erin White, Eleni Grove, and [Katie Murphy](#) in rehearsal with cellist Amy Domingues. Photo by Christopher Grady.

Running Time: 1 hour, 20 minutes with one intermission

***Enter Ophelia, distracted* plays June 20-28 at Capitol Hill Arts Workshop, 545 7th St SE, Washington, D.C.**

For Tickets, call 202-355-9441 or visit: <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/630141>

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