



Things to Do >

Weekend

Travel & Experiences

Arts

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

From 'The Pitt' to 'Hamlet': Patrick Ball and a twisty take on Shakespeare come to the L.A. stage

The actor behind Frank, the doctor with a pill problem in 'The Pitt,' stars in 'Slave Play' director Robert O'Hara's adaptation of "Hamlet." In this Mark Taper Forum production, the Danish prince is Hollywood royalty.



Gina Torres (“Suits”) and Patrick Ball (“The Pitt”) star in a new adaptation of “Hamlet” now in previews at the Mark Taper Forum. (Jason Armond / Los Angeles Times)



By Jessica Gelt

Staff Writer | [✕ Follow](#)

June 2, 2025 3 AM PT

To be or not to be a crazed murderer, that is the question at the bloody heart of the world premiere adaptation of “Hamlet” opening Wednesday at the Mark Taper Forum with Patrick Ball in the central role, fresh off his star-making turn as Dr. Frank Langdon in the Max hit series “The Pitt.”

Co-starring Gina Torres from “Suits,” this adaptation from director [Robert O’Hara](#) spins one of theater’s most famous plays into a modern-day world of decaying Hollywood glamour. There is a mansion on the coast and the remnants of a 1930s soundstage. Hamlet’s family runs a movie studio. The Danish prince is Hollywood royalty, and rather than being a tragic hero, his sanity and motive for murder are interrogated “CSI”-style in a bracing second act that flips the script on the first 90 minutes, which are viewed entirely from Hamlet’s perspective.

There are added scenes and plenty of salty language, with dialogue that shifts from classical to 21st century vernacular.

To be in this position at all — with his face on billboards, bus benches and streetlight banners across the city — is a “miracle,” Ball says. He was a relative unknown before scoring a starring role on the zeitgeisty medical drama “The Pitt,” which premiered in January and averaged more than 10 million viewers per episode, becoming one of Max’s top five original series premieres of all time.

Prior to that his only screen experience was a single episode of “Law & Order.” He had, however, spent a decade “grinding,” he says, “auditioning for film and TV, getting close but never happening.” He also spent four years traveling for regional theater, performing in shows including “Romeo & Juliet,” “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” and “The Lover” in places like Washington, D.C., St. Louis, Boston and San Diego.



Patrick Ball during a break in rehearsals for “Hamlet” at the Mark Taper Forum. (Jason Armond / Los Angeles Times)

“I had settled upon the fact that that was going to be it for me. And I was happy with that,” Ball says. “And the dream of Hollywood was something that I had let go of, and I made peace with the fact that that wasn’t going to be my life.”

Then all of a sudden “The Pitt” happened — and it felt like kismet. The North Carolina native’s mother is an emergency room nurse and his father is a paramedic. The stories told on the Noah Wyle-led drama resonated with him. His parents read through the pilot episode and said, “This checks out. This is real medicine,” Ball says, recalling how excited they were for him. To be able to tell stories that are meaningful to the community he grew up in, he says, feels like a blessing.

So does working with seasoned pros like O’Hara and Torres. O’Hara, who is also an established playwright, received a Tony nomination in 2020 for directing Jeremy O.

Harris' critically acclaimed "Slave Play," [which set a box-office record](#) during its West Coast premiere at the Taper, grossing \$1.4 million in five weeks. Ball says that after seeing the show in New York, he spent the next [four hours straight discussing it](#) with the friend he went with.



ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

ADUs made of shipping containers and robot-built bungalows are a growing trend as L.A. rebuilds post-fire

May 9, 2025

O'Hara is obsessed with true-crime shows like "48 Hours," in which culprits stick to their stories of innocence even when faced with video replays of their guilt, so he built the second act of his production in a moody, film-noir, flashback style, with a detective questioning characters after the play's end-of-show massacre. Think David Lynch meets Alfred Hitchcock with a Salvador Dali-painted set.

"I think that the audience watching will go: 'Wait a second, really, you put poison in his ear? Who puts poison in an ear?'" O'Hara says during an interview after rehearsal, while Ball and Torres sit laughing beside him. "And where are you guys getting all this poison? Poison in the glass, poison on the sword. This is something I didn't make up, but somehow Claudius has a stash of poison."

And what about that ghost?

Shakespeare's Hamlet sees a ghost who tells him that his uncle Claudius murdered his father; O'Hara's Hamlet may or may not have seen a ghost. He might just be a crazy person pretending to act extra crazy in order to get away with murder. In the highly stylized universe of Hollywood noir, glamour and mental illness walk hand-in-hand; entitlement and privilege run amok.

Shakespeare rarely writes about common people, O'Hara notes. "Which goes back to the L.A.-ness of it all," Ball chimes in. "My title is 'prince,' right? And what's the American equivalent of that? It's celebrity. The Elsinore of America is Hollywood. So to be able to tell this story, in that way, in this town, is a very cool opportunity."

To Ball's surprise, O'Hara hadn't seen "The Pitt" when he decided to cast Ball as Hamlet. O'Hara, rather, reacted to the strength of Ball's audition, which Ball self-taped on his phone in a frenetic style that Ball later felt was "insane."

"You have to have confidence, you have to have the audacity to believe that you are going to do Hamlet — and that you *can* do Hamlet," O'Hara says. "Because if I had to deal with someone who I had to pump up, or I had to make him believe that he can do it, it would be a whole different process."



“My first thought was, ‘I don’t know if my peri-menopausal brain can do this,’” Gina Torres says of her turn as Gertrude in “Hamlet.” (Jason Armond / Los Angeles Times)

O’Hara knew one thing for sure: He wanted Torres to play Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude. He loved her in “The Matrix” sequels and also as the formidable lawyer Jessica Pearson on “Suits.” He was so certain that he didn’t even ask her to audition. Torres, however, had reservations.

“My first thought was, ‘I don’t know if my peri-menopausal brain can do this,’” she says, laughing. But then she read O’Hara’s script and she was sold. “I was so seduced by the idea that we get to see a Gertrude that we’ve never seen before.”

Torres’ screen resume is miles long but her stage credits, not so much. Which is funny, she says, because as a New York native, her only goal was to be a Broadway star. But she got cast in a recurring role on a soap opera, and then a pilot and away she went.

“Talk to any New York actor, and they’re like, ‘I’m just doing enough TV so that I can go back home and do theater.’ I hear it all the time. And then eight years go by,” she says.



ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Trump fires Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery Director Kim Sajet

May 30, 2025

There is an electric moment between the time a stage manager calls “places” and the curtain rises, Torres says. That’s the feeling actors live for.

“We just fly,” she says. “And we’re chasing that sense of flight and connecting on stage, and if something goes wrong, we’re using it. We’re not starting over, we’re not gonna stop. There’s no safety net.”

That feeling is something O’Hara sought to harness with his adaptation. He doesn’t ask for more than one run-through a day. He wants to keep things fresh, with the possibility of freedom and breakthroughs. The cast, he says, must have room to find the play.

“I don’t want it to be drilled in,” he says. “I want there to be a little bit of titillating and vibration going on.”

'Hamlet'

Where: Mark Taper Forum, 135 N. Grand Ave.,
L.A.

When: 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 2:30 and 8
p.m. Saturdays, 1 and 6:30 p.m. Sundays,
through July 6; check for exceptions

Tickets: Start at \$45.25

Info: (213) 628-2772
or centertheatregroup.org

Running time: 2 hours (no intermission)

More to Read

Review

Canadian pride booms, dual Hamlets duel and Rian Johnson’s knives are out (again) at a 50th TIFF

Sept. 8, 2025



Chloé Zhao went through a 'very painful fire' before turning heartbreak into 'Hamnet'

Aug. 31, 2025



Review

Robert O'Hara's incoherent 'Hamlet' is even more of a mystery than the original

June 6, 2025



Jessica Gelt

Jessica Gelt is an arts and culture writer for the Los Angeles Times.