County Durham’s Ensemble ‘84 presents Shakespeare’s Hamlet in a rarely performed first quarto version

Thursday 7 May, 2026

A County Durham theatre company brings an urgent new staging of Shakespeare’s tragedy, providing a fresh perspective on the familiar story.

Ensemble ‘84’s upcoming production brings Shakespeare’s First Quarto - The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet to Horden, County Durham. Using the rarely performed First Quarto text of Hamlet, this striking new staging brings a shorter, urgent version of Shakespeare’s tragedy.

A kingdom is unsettled. The King of Denmark is dead, his brother now wears the crown, and Prince Hamlet is left grieving - and suspicious. When the ghost of his father appears with a terrible revelation, Hamlet is drawn into a dangerous quest for truth and revenge. As secrets unravel and loyalties are tested, the royal court becomes a place of spies, deception and growing madness. Hamlet must decide how to act in a world that no longer feels certain.

The First Quarto text of Hamlet drives the story forward with pace, punch and clarity. Told with striking differences in structure, dialogue and character names, the story unfolds with compelling theatrical energy, bringing the drama, poetry and humanity of this great play vividly to life.

Mark Dornford-May, Director and Artistic Director of Ensemble ‘84, said:

“Hamlet remains one of the most powerful and enduring plays ever written. The First Quarto version gives us a fascinating and highly theatrical way into the story; it moves with urgency and clarity, allowing the drama to unfold with remarkable pace. For a company like Ensemble ‘84, rooted in storytelling and performance, it offers a thrilling opportunity to rediscover this extraordinary play.”

For Ensemble ‘84, the production continues the company’s commitment to creating bold theatre rooted in the North East while engaging with stories that resonate far beyond the region.

Ensemble ‘84 is part of Into the Light – County Durham’s place-based cultural partnership, brought together to drive regeneration and opportunities for growth in the county’s creative sector.

Now in its third year, the success of projects like Ensemble ’84 highlight the importance of creating the right infrastructure to harness talent and potential within traditionally underserved communities.

Julia Handelman-Smith, Director of Into the Light, said: “If the superb performances of Mother Courage and Pits, People and Players are anything to go by, then we are in for a real treat with Ensemble ‘84’s latest production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

“At Into the Light, we are thrilled to be part of Ensemble ‘84’s founding story. The company has brought world-class theatre training to Horden, created jobs, and incredible opportunities that are deeply connected to the place they’re part of.

“We’re really looking forward to seeing the show for ourselves, and can’t wait for audiences across the region to experience something truly special on their doorstep.”

LISTINGS INFORMATION

The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Shakespeare’s First Quarto

By William Shakespeare

The Playhouse,

South Terrace,

Horden, Peterlee,

SR8 4NQ

Media:



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26th May - 6th June 2026.

Performances: 28th May at 7pm, 26, 27, 29, 30 May, 2, 4, 5 and 6 June at 7:30pm, matinees at 2:30pm on 30 May, 3 and 6 June.

Tickets: £10 for previews (26 & 27 May); £16 for all other performances, with optional £10 concessions ‘no questions asked’ and £20 ‘show of additional support’.

Running Time: approx 90 minutes

Age restriction advised: 12+

Box office: www.ensemble84.com/first-quarto-hamlet / 0191 300 4340

Website: ensemble84.com

Facebook: facebook.com/ensemble84theatre

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