



Film Wallahs

Hamlet

Hamlet

Directed by: Aneil Karia

©: Hamlet Film Production Limited,
British Broadcasting Corporation,
The British Film Institute, Confluent Partners LLC
a Left Handed Films, Storyteller, JW Films,
Confluent Films production

in association with: Waypoint Entertainment

Made with the support of the: BFI Filmmaking Fund

Presented by: Focus Features, BBC Film

in association with: BFI

Executive Producers: Eva Yates, Claudia Yusef,
Louise Ortega, Ken Kao, Josh Rosenbaum,
P.J. van Sandwijk

Produced by: James Wilson, Riz Ahmed,
Michael Lesslie, Allie Moore, Tommy Oliver
Co-producer: Greg McManus

Production Manager: Daniel Watkins

Financial Controller: Amanda Fox

Unit Manager: Hamish Gray

Supervising Location Manager: Eugene Strange

Post-production Supervisor: Nadiya Luthra

Researcher: Lucy Pardee

1st Assistant Director: Marc A. Wilson

Script Supervisor: Silvia Bellitto

Casting by: Lara Manwaring

Indian Casting: Tess Joseph

Screenplay by: Michael Lesslie

Based on the play by: William Shakespeare

Director of Photography: Stuart Bentley

Visual Effects Supervisor: Adam Azmy

Visual Effects: One of Us

SFX: Elements Special Effects Ltd

Special Effects Supervisor: Johnny Rafique

Editors: Mikkel E.G. Nielsen, Amanda James

Production Designer: Chris Oddy

Supervising Art Director: Adam Marshall

Art Director: James Turner

Set Decorator: Hannah Spice

Graphic Designer: Oona Brown

Costume Designer: Nirage Mirage

Hair & Make-up Designer: Lisa Mustafa

Prosthetics Designer: Suzi Battersby

Titles Designer: Ananya Mohan

Colourist: Simone Grattarola

Music by: Maxwell Sterling

Music Supervisor: Bridget Samuels

Choreography: Akram Khan

Production Sound Mixer: Nadine Richardson

Re-recording Mixers: Andrew Stirk, George Elliott

Supervising Sound Editors: Steve Little,

Michael Fentum

Stunt Co-ordinator: Nrinder Dhudwar

Cast:

Riz Ahmed (*Hamlet*)

Morfydd Clark (*Ophelia*)

Joe Alwyn (*Laertes*)

Sheeba Chadha (*Gertrude*)

Avijit Dutt (*Hamlet's father*)

Art Malik (*Claudius*)

Timothy Spall (*Polonius*)

Krish Misra (*Osric*)

Rajiv Sharma (*Hindu priest*)

Kash Ahmad (*Reynaldo*)

Eben Figueiredo (*Marcellus*)

Subhash Viman Gorania, Cerys Lewis, Estela

Merlos, Imogen Alvares, Kacper Lajewski, Kristina

Alleyne, Oliver Rumaizen, Radha Singh, Sade

Alleyne, Sama Daw, Thomasin Gülgeç

(*wedding dancers*)

UK-USA 2025 113 mins Digital

Film Wallahs is curated by Tongues on Fire

Riz Ahmed and Aneil Karia on 'Hamlet'

What drew you to tell this story, and why Hamlet now?

RA: When I first connected with the material, I was in a really raw place as a teenager, going through a turbulent time. I had this amazing English teacher who gave me the play and what I read on the page was really what I was feeling. I had a visceral connection from it ever since, and I wanted to bring that to other people – young people and people of all ages, frankly. I wanted to share that visceral, electrifying experience I had, and I knew the person to make this electric version of *Hamlet* was Aneil Karia.

AK: Like so many people, I'd left school thinking Shakespeare wasn't 'for me'. But when I read the script Riz sent, it felt personal and contemporary in ways I hadn't expected. There was an intimacy and urgency in Mike's [Lesslie] adaptation that really pulled me in, and it kind of blew away everything I thought Shakespeare was or could be.

You both previously collaborated on the Oscar-winning short The Long Goodbye. Is that the genesis of your collaboration on Hamlet?

RA: Yes. Like *Hamlet*, *The Long Goodbye* was about fusing poetry with visceral action. Aneil marries those two things so well. It's what we wanted to do with this *Hamlet*. When you take something raw and poetic and you put it together, in someone like Aneil's hands, it's electricity in a bottle. It's what I felt when I saw Aneil's film, *Surge*. That's what I see when I watch his music videos for rap artists like Stormzy and Kano. He takes the gritty and elevates it. And he takes the elevated and poetic and makes it gritty.

AK: Yes and by that point I'd also been making films with artists like Kano that wove poetry and rhythm into raw narrative. So *Hamlet* started to make sense as an evolution of this journey of bringing verse into grounded, lived action.

RA: In fact his background in connection to rap videos was crucial for this adaptation because he is all about rhythm, and his camera is always dancing with the performer. I do feel *Hamlet* shares a lot with contemporary rap. If you listen to Kendrick Lamar's *Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers* album – it's all about self-doubt, rage and trying to reach a new breakthrough. That's exactly like *Hamlet*.

It does feel very grounded – very personal and intimate as an adaptation – how did you want to capture that feeling? What makes this Hamlet different?

AK: By doubling down on the idea of a very subjective, first-person adaptation. Any scene that *Hamlet* wasn't in, we cut. Every time we get ahead of him as an audience, we choose to experience things with him in real time instead. Everything from how we lit the set, used the camera and cut the film was about being right there with him, inside his head, and experiencing his unravelling viscerally – rather than witnessing a staged version of it. So often when I'd watch Shakespeare, on stage or on screen, I'd feel emotionally held at a distance, as if I was just observing a plot unfold from afar. I wanted to change that, to be in *Hamlet's* skin, to breathe the same air as him. The temptation is to treat *Hamlet* like a relic but instead we wanted to smash that glass and make it feel urgent and like right now: messy, visceral, overwhelming.

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RA: Yes, we all felt like *Hamlet* is often being performed for audiences rather than being experienced by them. So Mike made all these script cuts and Aneil made all these creative decisions so you're finding things out in real time with him. And from an acting point of view I wanted to prioritise physical feeling over clearly reciting the words – let the rhythm of the poetry bring us closer to the heartbeat of the character rather than laying out the cleverness of the verse. We were all trying to create the feeling of a real time *Hamlet*, a first-person shooter *Hamlet*. You're on his shoulder, you're in his head, you're seeing what he is seeing, and feeling what he's feeling – you're on this intense rollercoaster with him.

Shakespeare's themes are timeless. What is it about Hamlet in particular that continues to resonate?

RA: Our writer Mike Lesslie and I have been working on this for 13 years! I have been dreaming of making this since I was 16! So in all honesty a timeless story is always going to be timely. This story is about feeling that the world is a crazy place, so crazy that you feel like you're losing your mind. It's about feeling so frustrated and powerless in the face of that, that we kind of want to burn it all down. And it's about complicated family dynamics. Everyone can relate to these feelings. Across the centuries and across cultures these feelings have always been about right now.

AK: Ultimately it all resonates personally because *Hamlet* is about home and family, about growing up to find the people closest to you both familiar and estranged. At its heart, he's a son grieving his father and struggling to trust the very institutions around him – even the ones he's bound up in. Those are lived realities, not abstractions. That's why the story still feels so close to home; those are lived realities, not abstractions.

This is the first time in cinema we have a non-white Hamlet in Shakespeare's original verse. What does setting Hamlet in a British South-Asian community mean culturally for the story? What was the decision to cast a majority of Brown actors?

RA: In a way it was very simple. If I'm going to play Hamlet, who's going to play my family? It just felt natural. But then when you follow that you see all the other benefits of how it brings the story to life in a fresh way. Firstly, it just shows how this is such a universal story. We're putting it in a super specific place, and that doesn't make it less relatable, it's making it feel more real and grounded. For example, a lot of those story points in *Hamlet* really are part of the lived experience in my own community. There's a tradition of men marrying their sister-in-laws if their brother dies, as a way to protect the orphans. The spirit world and possession is something most people have belief in and experience of. Hamlet can't marry Ophelia because she's from the 'wrong family' – that stuff is totally real for us. So by rooting the play here, we weren't just putting Shakespeare in new clothes – we were unlocking what was already there and amplifying it.

Production notes