

A Macbeth

By William Shakespeare, directed by Tiger Reel

Knightsbridge Theater

Runs: 1/15/2005 thru 2/27/2005

There seems to be a trend in waiver theater these days for single credit productions, with the director also acting as producer, designer and chief bottle-washer. In the best of cases, this can produce a unified vision and polished results; in the worst of cases, it is a disastrous ode to someone's misguided ego. Happily, the current production of Macbeth at the Knightsbridge Theater falls into the former category.

Tiger Reel has adapted, directed, designed, lit, and costumed Shakespeare's famous human drama of ambition, desire, and guilt, and in the process created a brooding, seething world heavy with self-torture. From the soundtrack, to the lighting, and the opaque, hand-hung scrimms and their menacing shadow-dances, this is a world turning ever darker, descending ever deeper into the enervating mental labyrinth of Macbeth's fatal obsession.

It is clear from the outset that this will not be your run-of-the-mill Macbeth. The cast lounges around the stage in preparation for their performance, applying make-up, arranging costumes, stretching, and vocalizing, as though backstage. Even the stage manager's call for places takes place in plain view, unhidden from the audience. And from there the play proceeds, from its eerie, chanting opening, with each passing verse tearing away layers of social pretence until the ugly black heart is revealed.

The knock-out ensemble is punctuated with brilliant moments from almost every cast member. The weird witch sisters especially (Debra Brenda, Jennifer Gabbert, Julie Terrell) are frightening and fascinating, inhabiting an other-worldly realm of their own creation; grotesque creatures that slither, hiss and conjure curses and ghastly visions. Eric Baldwin as a militaristic Macbeth, manages the tenuous balance between despot and demented, with the balance ever tipping further towards the latter; his need, his lust for power, his overwhelming desperation to get to, and stay on, the top, propelling him further and deeper in the murky, viscous waters of moral corruption. Keith Edie (Duncan/Macduff) and Geoffrey Hillback (Malcolm/1st Murderer) turn in clearly defined and highly nuanced dual roles, and share a memorable scene. Mike Mahaffey and Lacy Altwine choreograph a most frightening and savage knife fight.

Marti Hale however, clearly a powerhouse performer who oozes lust and a weakness for power, is an odd choice for Baldwin's Lady Macbeth, lending a rather Oedipal tone to the relationship, and she tends to slip into unintelligible murmuring during her seduction scenes.

This is not a superficial attempt to make Shakespeare "different" and "new"; Reel has in fact created a sinister world in a specific time and place in which the eternal themes so deftly crafted by Shakespeare live on.