

MACBETH: A WALKING SHADOW

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January 5, 2007

"Macbeth: A Walking Shadow," Andrew Frank and Doug Silver's rearranged, adapted version of Shakespeare's bloody Scottish play, is oozing with copious surprises. With perceptive direction by Mr. Frank and a company of actors who give human dignity to the unaltered Bard's words, even staunch traditionalists are not likely to be displeased with a mayhem-packed evening of exciting theater rather than a sacrosanct rendering of the text.

In Manhattan Theater Source's intimate (two rows of seats bracketing an oblong playing space) theater, the action begins near the end of the "original" with a confrontation between Macbeth (an outstandingly dynamic Ato Essandoh) and MacDuff (a subtly noble Lou Carbonneau), rendering an insightful glimpse of the composition of the man who has killed his king. The arrogance, insecurity, guilt, valiance, and pride of Macbeth that are all on display--before an eye-opening sword fight--will resonate and be expanded upon in the subsequent eighty minutes which will transport one back and forward in the chronology of the tragedy.

Although the drunken porter ("Knock! knock, knock!"), a few other minor characters and the fourth apparition may have been editorially exorcized, no "Macbeth" would be worthy without its three witches. Here they are outstandingly and eerily played at different times by five cast members, who transform themselves before our very eyes into one of the best Weird Sisters' acts to be encountered. Celia Schaefer also contributes to this fine production as a down-to-earth Lady Macbeth who is less a manipulator than a motivator in desiring her husband to be "partners in greatness." She and Mr. Essandoh--who is on stage in character, observer or overseer throughout—display a wide variety of emotions, always hitting the mark with the right intensity or subtly. Their fervor, intensified by their proximity to the audience, the somber lighting (Steve Arnold) and the intriguing sound effects (Drew Bellware) often make the shadowy imaginary world most palpable.

Quality acting is manifest as well by all of the supporting performers, but particularly outstanding are Michael Baldwin's Malcolm, as actor and character seem to simultaneously grow in potency, and Megan Reilly's heart rendering Lady MacDuff, displaying first anger at her husband's desertion and then horror in realizing her fate at the hands of a Macbeth-sent murderer.



In addition to those not-to-be-mentioned-here surprises, most notable for me are Lady Macbeth's conjuring of her "unsex me here" spirits, Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" (Think Lear raging against the storm.) and Macbeth and MacDuff's confrontation (the second time around).

Through the ages, there have been many adaptations of Shakespeare's plays which would have, no doubt, upset the Bard; however, I think if he got a peek at his one, he might be quite pleased.