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Macbeth - A Walking Shadow

By: *Loria Parker*



Photo by Kate Sessions

manhattantheatresource is a performance workshop now in its eighth year. Their artistic mission is to provide "a playground for passion and mistakes, hard work, cooperation; for big ideas and small budgets." The current production, *Macbeth - A Walking Shadow*, fulfills this mission.

It is a pared to the bone, 75 minute intermissionless production of "the Scottish play" that delivers a theater experience true to the story's purpose. Illuminating the underbelly of human ambition and lust for power, the audience is held spellbound, as Macbeth (Ato Essandoh) revisits the events leading to his downfall. Without costumes or sets, and only a few necessary swords and daggers, the story, in retrospect, unfolds.

Dunsinane, not unlike our current world, is a dangerous and savage place, as Macbeth, urged by three "weird sisters" and his wily wife, Lady Macbeth (Celia Shaefer) begins his murderous ascent to the throne. Although the adaptation goes forward and back a few times, the message of the play is crystal clear, as Mr. Essandoh and Ms. Shaefer deliver believable, ferocious performances. They are at the top of their games in this piece and set the bar high for the rest of the ensemble to follow, and follow they do. Banquo (Len Childers) is solid as he tries to remain loyal to Macbeth, at his own peril. MacDuff (Lou Carbonneau) and Lady MacDuff (Meghan Reilly) give fine performances and Malcolm (Michael Baldwin) is outstanding as the murdered Duncan's son, doubting his own morality and ability to become the King. The other cast members play double and sometimes triple roles, shifting from loyal servants and soldiers, into the Three Witches and murdering henchmen and then back again. The psychological implications of the mercurial nature that is human, is well served by this convention, and further fuels Macbeth's rampage and reflection. Notably transforming into these many roles are Chuck Bunting, as the slain King Duncan, and later, a Witch, Ridley Parson, as a Murderer/Witch, Amy Dickenson, as Ross/Witch, Lex Woutas, as Lennox/Witch, and James Edward Becton, as Witch/Soldier/Doctor.

It is, however, Ms. Schaefer and Mr. Essandoh that make this adaptation work so well. Their skill, chemistry, and total commitment to their work is unmistakably the stuff of great theatre, that always compels and engages an audience. Mr. Frank's direction is simple and it's as though the actors are making it up as they go along, and that's quite an accomplishment for so complex a play. The lighting design by Steven Arnold is integral to the play's success, as it replaces sets, and implies time changes. The fight choreography by Jason Howard works well in the tiny venue. All in all, ***Macbeth - A Walking Shadow*** is a whirlwind, reflecting the relative issues of flawed leaders and political corruption that are universal and timeless and facing us this very day.

By William Shakespeare , Adaptation by Andrew Frank and Doug Silver

through January 27 at ***manhattantheatresource***, 177 MacDougal Street, 212-352-3101.