

## New Theater Corps

### An Insightful Look at What's Happening on The New York Stage

*THEATER TALK* has enlisted a group of up-and-coming, young theater professionals to see and review some of the latest stage productions in the NY Tri-State area.

We hope the comments they post on this blog will be useful.

**Saturday, January 13, 2007**

#### [Macbeth: A Walking Shadow](#)

An essential Shakespearian production, boiled down to its essence (and pared down to seventy-five minutes), this adaptation of *Macbeth* keeps the Bard's language, but heightens the haunting with a lot of clever direction from Andrew Frank and some excellent acting from the cast (led by Ato Essandoh).



Reviewed by [Aaron Riccio](#)

Soldiers turn into witches, dead men creep around, and Macbeth is trapped onstage, caught in a series of flashbacks e'en as he fights that epic battle with Macduff: this isn't your parents' Shakespeare. It's better. That's not knocking the elongated prose of the bard, but Andrew Frank and Doug Silver's new adaptation of *Macbeth* (here subtitled "A Walking Shadow"), has managed to emphasize the magnificent language by cutting out the majority of it. The scenes glide smoothly from one key moment to the next, whirling around a horrified Macbeth (the excellent Ato Essandoh), and showing, more than ever, how a heroic man becomes a despot. Politically resonant, emotionally relevant, and theatrically elegant, this new production of *Macbeth* needs to be seen. And at seventy-five minutes and only \$18.00, you can even see it again and again.

Director Andrew Frank uses the intimate space of Manhattan Theater Source to mount an epic production, and succeeds, placing all the action on a narrow slab of stage between two rows of the audience. The action, long and narrow across that black strip, makes every scene into a fierce showdown, none stronger than the pivotal moment when the tempestuous Lady Macbeth (Celia Schaefer) convinces her husband to murder the fair King Duncan (Chuck Bunting). Schaefer's compelling performance is quiet at first, not manic, which gives her opportunity to build to a murderous pitch by her climactic "spot" speech. Better still, because Macbeth is condemned to remain on stage, seeing all that has led him to his bitter end, we can watch Essandoh's marvelous reaction to moments he would never actually witness in a more orthodox Shakespearean production.

But this is far from the Essandoh and Schaefer show, fabulous as both are. The cast is engaging and outstandingly clear, so much so that almost every line becomes quotable. Everything is so focused, so intense, that we cannot look away. And why would we want to? From Malcom's mournful anger (Michael Baldwin) to Banquo's loyal demeanor (Len Childers), there are plenty of nuanced performances to enjoy. James Edward Becton, cast in a melange of small roles (witch, soldier, and doctor), was the most captivating performer of the night, a man truly living his part.

T'would be a shame to miss this excellent production, nay, an unforgivable sin. I hope Frank and Silver will consider cutting some other Shakespearean plays: what they've created here is not only a flattering adaptation, but a short and sweet *Macbeth* that is as perfect for schools as it is for even the most grown-up, jaded audience.

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Manhattan Theater Source (177 MacDougal Street)  
Tickets (212-352-3101): \$18.00  
Performances: Wednesday-Saturday @ 8:00