

Mad Theatrics: MACBETH

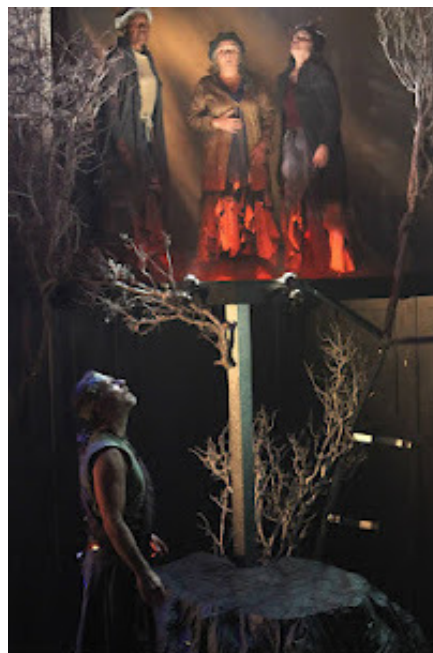
by William Shakespeare
 an Antaeus Production
 directed by Jessica Kubzansky
 the Kinsmen Cast

review by Phillip Kelly

As far as productions of *Macbeth* go, or LA productions for that matter, this show is a technical achievement. From the set to costumes, lighting, sound design, directing to performances you can tell everyone involved are professionals of their craft. It's a strong production, with very good performances. Fair or not, I'm going to spend some time below talking about what could have made the show that much better for me, because I hold Antaeus to a higher standard than most.

What I liked, the director, Kubzansky, made enough interesting choices throughout the night to keep things fresh, while remaining a fairly straightforward classical interpretation. One of these choices, is to start the show at the funeral of the Macbeths' child. This death is something that's referenced only a few times throughout the play and most productions tend not to deal with it at length. Kubzansky hits you with it from lights up. It gives a really interesting spin to several of the moments throughout the production, most unsettling, the murder of Macduff's family, and Ann Noble (Lady Macbeth) and Bo Foxworth (Macbeth), use this scene to bring some of their moments to life in ways I haven't seen before. It grounds them in a stronger reality as things go awry.

The classical interpretation includes the performances as well (except for maybe the Witches, but I'll come back to that); Foxworth, and his Lady, Ann, are strong actors. They follow the map set out with clarity and emotional intensity. Of all of Shakespeare's shows, the map is hard to stray from. Almost immediately we're told the story, and Macbeth is told his destiny. What room does that allow the actors to take. If he hadn't taken the actions he took, would that destiny still have prevailed? If he had stepped back and let things take their course, would the predictions have come true? Is there a part of Macbeth that believes he's worthy of this before it's handed to him? This all should be dealt with in the characterizations. And these are questions I've been asking myself since seeing the production. This brings me to thinking about what I thought was missing from the production. The night I went, the actors on stage were a little disconnected. They were doing what was rehearsed very well, but not always playing off of each other or reacting genuinely to each



Bo Foxworth, Fran Bennett, Elizabeth Swan, Susan Boyd Joyce
 Photo by Daniel Blinoff

other, but it wasn't that. That can happen in theatre, depending on the night.

There were a few things I think that kept me emotionally disjointed for a portion of the production. The connection to deeper characterizations or choices with Macbeth that might have clued me in to what Kubzansky and Foxworth thought about the character, not where the characters was going, but who he was before his descent. Is Macbeth a simple man? One who's unwise? Normally superstitions exist in those that are simpler people. Does he carry himself nobly? Or with a chip on his shoulder? Who is this man before he is told who he will become? It's clear that he's well liked, and seems friendly, but it's not enough to fill in those blanks. How mad is he driving himself? To imagine to see a dagger in front of him, floating in mid air, how curious, and yet the performance given matched the performance given in many of the other scenes. There wasn't a distinction made, or a build to and from it. I was often missing the why. The lines were there, performed well, but not everything was colored in. I think where this could have been explored most was in Macbeth's speeches. Alone, speaking aloud, we should be able to see through the veneer to who he really is. It isn't simply thinking out loud, it's struggling with everything that defines who you are. And those definitions were lacking.

Where does ambition come from? From someone telling you or you believing that you deserve something better. Macbeth has to be told this, which means he may have never thought it. That's one choice. Maybe he's always thought it but never had the gumption to get it, until now, so he dives head in and makes every bad decision to get there. Either way, deep down I never believe that Macbeth thinks he deserves to be King, but whatever the decision is it needs to inform every word and action clearly. Foxworth is a formidable actor and we see an arch - in the beginning he's friends with all and loved by everyone, and in the end he's detested by all and the blackest of souls, but it's not enough to truly bring the character to full life. My hope is that Foxworth will start to play a little more as the production continues and naturally find these nuances, as will many of the other actors.

This isn't to say I felt nothing throughout the night. There were heartbreaking moments from Foxworth and Noble. Noble, during the "out, out damn spots" and both during the banquet scene were spot on. Noble cracked me up with her dry delivery. Jesse Sharp was quite good in the smaller role of Angus, doing a great deal with very little, his physicality and disposition were natural and fluid. Peter Van Norden as Seyton gave an exceptional characterization, showing us just what kind of man would follow a king like Macbeth. However, James Sutorious as Macduff breaks your heart more than anyone else when he hears of his family's demise at the hands of Macbeth. The actual murder of and delivery of the news are probably the two best handled moments in the Kinsmen's show. Is this scene what makes Macbeth a tragedy? It almost felt so. Sutorious falls silent, his face pales, everything inside him is breaking at once. It's the most vulnerable moment we're allowed in the production, the closest we get to truly becoming a part of the story with the characters. This moment is briefly discolored by the emphatic shouting into the air that ends his moment. Things are more often given the emphatic treatment throughout, except, surprisingly for me, from the witches (Fran Bennett, Susan Boyd Joyce, Elizabeth Swain)! I wasn't sure how i felt at the beginning, because they seemed like normal ladies, but as Macbeth's story grows darker, so too did the witches, and with great nuance. A fine choice by Kubzansky. Those nuances I speak of, needed to be sprinkled throughout to turn this very good production into a great one.