

Theatre Review >> Macbeth

Written by Thomas Waldman, Theatre Reviewer



Elizabeth Swain, Fran Bennett, Susan Boyd Joyce

Photo by Daniel Blinkoff

In staging "Macbeth" for the Antaeus Company, director Jessica Kubzansky offers a different explanation for the title character's swift transformation from hero to murderer; profound grief. Neither the scheming of the witches (Fran Bennett, Susan Boyd Joyce, and Elizabeth Swain) nor his own previously disguised lust for power finally prompts this Macbeth (Bo Foxworth) to turn evil, but the unbearable pain of having lost an infant child.

To make the subsequent crimes conform to the facts, Kubzansky opens Act One with a wrenching scene that is not in Shakespeare's text. On a bleak, gray stage covered in thin bands of smoke, the court has gathered for the funeral of a nameless, faceless child, who is wrapped in a blanket.

When the tiny figure is placed inside a casket, Lady Macbeth (Ann Noble) begins to shriek like a madwoman. Once she is led off stage, followed by a somber group of mourners, the play resumes with the traditional beginning.

In an interview timed to the opening of the production, Kubzansky indicated that there is evidence in the text that the Macbeths lost a child. Whether that's the case, and if so, whether it will be accepted as the crucial motive in a string of brutal killings is for the audience to decide.

With their power over events diminished, the witches in this "Macbeth" are presented as three somewhat dotty middle-aged ladies who speak their dire prophecies in a quiet voice, with little intensity. Still, Macbeth must take their words seriously, although theatergoers may find it difficult to do so.

In another innovation, Kubzansky cast the character of Banquo, the Scottish general nearly equal in rank to Macbeth, with a black actor, Joe Holt. And Americans thought they were making history by electing Barack Obama in 2008.

At the performance I attended, Macbeth was played by Bo Foxworth, who registers in his eyes the character's psychological transformation from determined to wary to

paranoid and, finally, to resignation and defeat. The actor delivers many of Macbeth's critical speeches downstage, which enables him to look directly into the faces of the audience. His rendering of the doomed ruler is both fearless and powerful.

As Lady Macbeth, Noble is never calm or still. Her head and neck are in constant motion as she recites her lines. On Noble's slender frame is written her character's frenetic energy and desperate effort to outrace events.

Among the other performers, the tall Peter Van Norden is a wise and kind Duncan, an archetype of the benevolent king; his murder is a grave loss to all Scotland. As played by the white-bearded James Sutorius, MacDuff is roughly the same age as Foxworth's Macbeth. The final dual represents two middle-aged men battling over nothing less than the future of their land.

Using low bass notes and ominous rhythms, John Zalewski's sound design adds to the tension of scenes that play tense on the page. His work here reminds us that at its core "Macbeth" is a horror story that includes many details familiar to fans of the film genre; dimly lit castle, stormy weather, a corpse discovered in a back room. Jeremy Pivnick's muted lighting is an excellent complement to the sound and set.

"Macbeth" runs through August 26th at the Antaeus Company, 5112 Lankershim Boulevard, North Hollywood. Performances are Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m and Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. Tickets are priced at \$30 for Thursday and Friday and \$34 for Saturday and Sunday. To order, call 818-506-1983 or go online at

www.Antaeus.org