

## Macbeth (Thane Cast) @ Antaeus



Antaeus Classical Theatre Company continues its run of fine interpretive work with a double-cast *MACBETH* by William Shakespeare. After four opening night performances (two for each cast), the company then is put into a mix-'n-match mode, so if there is any one actor you are keen to see, go to their website and see how the casts are sorted out night-by-night). The second-night cast starred Rob Nagle as Macbeth and Tessa Auberjonois as Lady M. The first company, reviewed earlier, stars Bo Foxworth and Ann Nobel as Lord and Lady Macbeth.

Both companies were directed by theatre veteran Jessica Kubzansky more or less simultaneously, which can be difficult for director and actor alike. In spite of a need to make the character one's own, watching your compatriot play "your" role can be instructive, too. What works for them might very well be stolen or, put more kindly, borrowed for your characterization. And, of course, what is meaningful should be the end result. Here, both companies have strengths and weaknesses, which undoubtedly will smooth out over the weeks' run, but Kubzansky's marvelous production(s) illuminate the darkness of the 400+-year-old play.

On Tom Buderwitz' fine two-level unit set, with John Zalewski's atmospheric sound design, played subtly, and Jeremy Pivnick's moody and evocative lighting design, the cast looked great in Jessica Olson's Scottish costumes: modified kilts and combat boots for the men; long dresses for the rich female characters and rags for the Weird Sisters (never called "witches" in the play).

Rob Nagle's full-command of the language and his carefully-used subtlety of humor made his an overpowering performance, full of sound-and-fury, signifying much. Auberjonois found Lady M's humanity as well as her steel, which ends up killing her. The sexual bond between them was not as on tap as with the first company, but these two ruthless killers are clean of line, indeed. We truly see the growth of reckless ambition and how the rewards do not match the fantasy.

For those who didn't study *Macbeth* in high school or beyond, King Duncan of Scotland (Ned Schmidtke) is so impressed by General Macbeth's valor in the field, that he rewards him with a new honor: Thane of Cawdor, which adds property to his already established title, Thane of Glamis. But Macbeth (Nagle) and his lieutenant and best friend, Banquo (the superb Ramon de Ocampo), don't know that when they are waylaid in the forest by the Three Weird Sisters (Lorna Raver, Jane Carr, Sandra McClain) and are told that this new honor

for Macbeth will be over-matched by his becoming King, and for Banquo, the prophesy that he will be the father of kings yet to come (Shakespeare was undoubtedly buttering up King James I at the time, who was from Scotland), but will die early.

When Macbeth finds Duncan and is rewarded with Cawdor, he writes to his wife (Auberjonois), who immediately plots on how to kill Duncan and become Queen to match her husband's elevation. The dastardly deed is done and all hell breaks loose in Scotland, dour to begin with and now seething with hatreds and plotted-revenges against the increasingly psychotic Macbeth. Mayhem and blood follow liberally, with no one untouched by tragedy.

It's quite the drama, probably the most popular Shakespeare in 19th Century America (as *Hamlet* became the most popular classic in the 20th Century). And Kubzansky, indeed, knows her Bard, successfully fiddling with the order of the scenes and finding ways to take a large cast on a small space (Antaeus needs its own theatre!) and make it all work. Her one oddity is including the usually axed character of Hecate, queen of the Weird Sisters. But the 2¾ hour-long production also has a made-up opening scene in which Lord and Lady Macbeth have a touching funeral for their newborn, honored by all the Scottish nobles. Macduff (Daniel Blinkoff) and his Lady (Kimiko Gelman) are never on stage together, but we know their familial tug in the acting. Armin Shimerman as Ross, Brian Abraham as First Murderer, Christian Barillas' Malcolm, and the aforementioned actors all shine and bring forth the clarion bell for the audience's enjoyment.

Both companies deserve recognition and applause and Antaeus, yet again, proves itself worthy of full attention.

Macbeth plays through August 26th, 2012, at the Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd, North Hollywood, CA 91601 (one block south of Magnolia Avenue). Tickets: 818.506.1983 or [www.Antaeus.org](http://www.Antaeus.org).