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## MACBETH

### STAGEsceneLA WOW!

Director extraordinaire Jessica Kubzansky humanizes the murderous Macbeth and his lethal Lady McB in a uniquely powerful production of Shakespeare's "Scottish Play," particularly as performed by a mashup of the Antaeus Company's double-cast ensemble.



Rather than simply giving us a pair of overly ambitious wannabe royals egged on to commit their dastardly deeds by a trio of creepy, crawly witches, Kubzansky adds a powerful prologue, one inspired by an easily overlooked remark made by Lady Macbeth in Act I, Scene VII: "I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me."



Macbeth à la Kubzansky opens wordlessly as one by one the Macbeths' fellow Scots offer their condolences and pay their respects to the grieving couple at the funeral of their still nursing infant, ending with the agonized screams of a grief-stricken Lady Macbeth and a Macbeth every bit as devastated by their communal loss.

Without a child to give the couple hope for the future, what better way to get back at a heartless destiny than for Macbeth and his Lady to channel their energy into becoming King and Queen (and disposing of any and all who might stand in their paths)?

While this approach might seem a risky tweaking of a Shakespearean classic, it is one that reaps rich rewards in a production that ends up considerably more nuanced than the standard blood-and-guts extravaganza Shakespeare buffs have become accustomed to seeing.



Like all Antaeus Company productions, *Macbeth* is

double cast, with two separate ensembles of twenty actors each (dubbed the Thanes and the Kinsman) performing on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the run. (See [calendar](#) to find out who's performing on which dates.) Taking a cue from director Casey Stangl, who deliberately cast very different types for each role in last fall's *Peace In Our Time*, and continued by Andrew Traister in this past winter's *The Seagull*, Kubzansky has actors as dissimilar as the towering Rob Nagle and the considerably more compact Bo Foxworth sharing the role of Macbeth, young leading man John Sloan and older character actor Armin Shimerman as Ross, and Filipino American Ramón de Ocampo and African American Joe Holt as Banquo. As with *Peace In Our Time* and *The Seagull*, a month of rehearsals involving all forty actors was followed by two additional weeks during which the two casts rehearsed separately, the better to hone performances and to nuance interplay with castmates in the home stretch towards Opening Nights.

Thursday and Friday "Hurlyburly" performances, on the other hand, feature random groupings of about 50% Thanes and 50% Kinsmen, reconfigurations that keep actors very much on their toes and allow each weeknight audience an experience unique to the performance attended.



Not being able to schedule a pair of Opening Night

reviews, I opted for the very first Hurlyburly Thursday, an evening which had Thane Nagle and Kinsman Ann Noble as the titular spouses, Kinsman Brian Tichnell and Thane Paul Culos as Duncan heirs Malcolm and Donalbain, and Thane witches Lorna Raver and Sandra McLain joined, not by Kinsman Witch Two, but by Swing Witch Bonnie Snyder. Not surprisingly, having Thanes and Kinsmen performing for the first time in two and a half weeks opposite new scene partners kept Thursday particularly electric from start to finish, and made for a cast this reviewer could not have bettered had he handpicked its members one by one.

Nagle and Noble may not have shared a stage since weeks before, but you'd hardly have known it from their impeccably matched work, beginning with that devastating prologue in which each expressed the Macbeths' grief in distinct but equally gut-wrenching ways, then went on to paint indelible portraits of power lust gone mad.



Ned Schmidtke's double turns as King Duncan and steward Seyton, de Ocampo's younger than usual Banquo, real-life couple Shimerman and Kitty Swink as Ross and as witch queen Hecate and Lady Macduff, all proved cast standouts. A superb Tichnell made a particularly memorable impression opposite an equally riveting Blinkoff in the Act IV Scene III Malcolm-Macduff confrontation, the evening's most easily accessible scene despite archaic Elizabethan vocabulary and syntax. (That Tichnell and Blinkoff normally perform opposite different scene partners made Thursday's pairing all the more noteworthy.)

Witches Raver, Snyder, and McClain played it more kooky than creepy, a approach that seemed a tad disconcerting at first, but one that ultimately fit Kubzansky's particular vision to a T.

Completing Thursday's all-around outstanding blend of Thanes and Kinsmen were Thanes Culos, Daniel Dorr (Caithness, 2nd Murderer), and Joanna Strapp (Gentlewoman) and Kinsmen Joe Delafield (Lennox), Steve Hofvendahl (Doctor, Siward), Dylan La Rocque (Fleance, Son Macduff), Adam Meyer (First Murderer), Jesse Sharp (Angus), and Jason Thomas (Menteith).



Scenic designer Tom Buderwitz has adapted his set for last year's *The Malcontent* for this summer's *Macbeth*, retaining its Elizabethan stage layout (both plays debuted circa 1603) but adding boulders and bloodstained branches to suit *Macbeth*'s particular needs. Jessica Olson's costumes situate us sometime in Scotland's past with contemporary touches like Doc Martens-style boots and quirky one-sleeved tops (which it turns out are to represent the play's "perversion of nature" via a deliberately asymmetrical, i.e. perverse fashion statement). Jeremy Pivnick's moody lighting and Heather Ho's ingenious props (with swords of a deliberately shorter variety to allow man-to-man combat on the production's compact stage) are winners as well. Kudos to fight director Peter Katona for making the abovementioned duels both exciting and realistic. Completing the design package is the ever brilliant John Zalewski's doom-portending sound design, one which makes particularly effective use of Deaf West Theatre's unique sound system designed to allow hearing-impaired audiences to feel the sounds others are hearing.

Heading the Antaeus staff this season are Co-Artistic Directors Bill Brochtrup, Nagle, and Sloan and Associate Artistic Directors Shimerman and Swink. Katherine E. Haan is stage manager for *Macbeth*.

Though only the second fully-staged Shakespearean production in the Antaeus Company's 22-year history, *Macbeth* easily stands up to the best of *A Noise Within* or *L.A.*'s more Shakespeare-centric troupes. As Thursday's performance made amply clear, whether you opt for Thanes or Kinsmen or a Hurlyburly combination of both, you're in for an evening of The Bard at his most exciting and compelling.