



Elizabeth Swain, Fran Bennett, Susan Boyd Joyce

Photo by Daniel Blinkoff

Macbeth

Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theatre | 5112 Lankershim Blvd., NoHo | Through Aug. 26 | Tickets \$30-34 | antaeus.org

While there is nothing cartoonish about director Jessica Kubzansky's creepily intimate staging of Shakespeare's darkest tragedy, like the very best Looney Tunes cartoons, her provocative production can be enjoyed on multiple levels. If you've never experienced the Scottish play before, this is a clear, crisp telling, careening with blood and passion to its tragic conclusion; however, if you know the play inside and out, Kubzansky has added surprising

touches that will make you consider it anew.

For starters, the play begins with a wordless prologue (not in Shakespeare's text) in which the Macbeths mourn the death of an infant child, ceremoniously bidding goodbye in the company of the other Scottish thanes and King Duncan. Kubzansky's suggestion that the couple's vaulting ambition is in some way filling an emotional void from the loss of a child is a fascinating and humanizing take on characters later described as a "butcher and his fiend-like queen."

After Macbeth murders Duncan in his sleep, the same actor who played the dead king appears as Seyton, Macbeth's most loyal lackey. In addition to giving him the famous Porter's speech, Kubzansky has Seyton—a character whose name is devilishly close to "Satan"—bear witness to Macbeth's murderous plotting and participate in the killing of Banquo. Whether he is the devil himself or Macbeth's conscience, this character takes on added meaning in this nuanced version.

And, finally, the witches are not evil conjurers here so much as cynical, world-weary observers, a trio of older women dressed as street urchins who show up (in Macbeth's imagination?) for the famous banquet scene. Their air of resignation gives the play's events a tragic inevitability.

As always, Antaeus has two casts. I saw the "Kinsmen," headed by Bo Foxworth and Ann Noble as the Macbeths. A compact actor who would be ideal casting for John Edwards, Foxworth is powerful, but his focus on anger and fear doesn't allow us to see the great thane enjoy those moments when he thinks he's going to get away with it all. Noble is strong and passionate, and finds several opportunities to recall the lost child of the opening pantomime.

Peter Van Norden's seedy Seyton is a delicious contrast to his avuncular Duncan, and special mention goes to Brian Tichnell (Malcolm) and James Sutorius (Macduff) for making a famously incomprehensible Act Four scene crystal clear and engaging. Sutorius' reaction to the news of his family's slaughter is exquisite.

Designer Tom Buderwitz continues to find surprising ways to use the cozy Deaf West space, and Jeremy Pivnick's evocative lighting combines with John Zalewski's appropriately unsettling sound and Jessica Olson's muted, punk/kilt costumes to create the eerie, foggy world of this disturbing tale—a Scottish play for Shakespeare geeks and newbies alike. —*Christopher Cappiello*
