

Macbeth: Theatre Review

5:44 PM PDT 7/19/2012 by Myron Meisel



Paul Culos, Ned Schmidtke and Christian Barillas

The Bottom Line

Cogent mounting distinguished by subtle light and sound and a deep bench of supporting players.

Venue

The Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theater, North Hollywood (runs through Aug. 26).

Playwright

William Shakespeare

Director

Jessica Kubzansky

The Antaeus Company takes on Shakespeare's classic in a double-cast North Hollywood production directed by Jessica Kubzansky.

Following last summer's superb *King Lear*, the Antaeus Company returns with director **Jessica Kubzansky's** *Macbeth*, completely double-cast in the Antaeus tradition (one troupe dubbed "The Thaness" and the other "The Kinsmen," which alternate on weekends, with intermixed casts scrambled on weekday performances), 40 actors in all, ready to play in any combination in service of a single concept. And Kubzansky, co-artistic director of Pasadena's Boston Court, has a distinctive take that elicits new insights into the text.

Most significantly, the action opens with a five-minute wordless sequence not in the play, of Macbeth and his Lady burying their dead infant. While obliquely hinted at in Shakespeare's dialogue, making their grief explicit illuminates much of the couple's motivations thereafter, providing no excuse or sympathy but yielding a great deal of clarity, plainly adding a dimension of envy over the issue of their victims, all loyal and loving friends. The first spoken words come from a pregnant goddess Hecate, in a speech cribbed from later in the play, informing us from the start of Macbeth's delusionary trust in the witches' prophecy will undo him.

Rob Nagle's Macbeth is a bluff fellow, a warrior none too bright for all his tortured introspection, a guy who just wants to get to that point where he can rationalize his evil deeds. **Tessa Auberjonois'** Lady Macbeth physically suggests her barren loss drives her to hector her husband to his purpose.

However, the greatest tribute to the Company is the strength of technique in the supporting parts, including many of the smaller roles that often make little impression, such as Lennox (**Jeff Thomas Gardner**) and Ross (**Armin Shimerman**), who shine here in much the way that Lear's stalwart retainer Kent always steals the show with blunt steadfastness.

Enlisting the same actor to play both the murdered King Duncan and Seyton, Macbeth's cutthroat, is a daring ploy by Kubzansky, especially when **Ned Schmidtke** emerges from Duncan's death chamber now in the role of an accomplice to his killing. The ever-reliable **Ramon de Ocampo** is cast as a much younger Banquo than customary and makes that novelty work inventively for the character.

While modestly mounted on the Antaeus' tiny stage, the design elements are particularly impressive from local pillars of Los Angeles theater. With limited resources, **John Zalewski**'s menacing and often subliminal sound interplays complexly with the action, while **Jeremy Pivnick** frequently achieves expressive lighting effects comparable to crafted movie close-ups within the stage space.

Generally, the production picks up momentum as it goes along, with simple but crackerjack battle scenes, and a forceful build to the climaxes. And Kubzansky holds yet one more textual gambit for the very end, giving a well-known classic a genuine surprise ending.

Venue: The Antaeus Company at Deaf West Theater, North Hollywood (runs through Aug. 26)

Director: Jessica Kubzansky

Playwright: William Shakespeare

Cast Reviewed ("The Thanes"): Rob Nagle, Tessa Auberjonois, Ramon De Ocampo, Daniel Blinkoff, Ned Schmidtke, Armin Shimerman, Jeff Thomas Gardner, Christian Barillas, Jesse Sharp, Todd Waring, Kimiko Gelman, Lorna Raver, Jane Carr, Sandra McClain, Jason Thomas; ("The Kinsmen"): Bo Foxworth, Ann Noble, Joe Holt, Peter Van Norden, James Sutorius, John Sloan, Kitty Swink, Joe Delafield, Alex Knox, Steve Hofvendahl, Brian Tichnell, Fran Bennett, Susan Boyd Joyce, Elizabeth Swain, Sam Breen.

Set designer: Tom Buderwitz

Lighting designer: Jeremy Pivnick

Sound designer: John Zalewski

Fight director: Peter Katona