

Clearly envisioned 'Macbeth' offers gorgeous spectacle

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For 25 years, the Nashville Shakespeare Festival has earned a reputation for excellence with its innovative interpretation of classic material. And its current production of "Macbeth" is no exception.

A gorgeous spectacle that infuses the dark story line with elements of ballet and even industrial rock music, the piece is marked by director Matt Chiorini's clear vision and many notable performances.

Local theater lovers are certainly familiar with Chiorini, who served as artistic director at People's Branch Theatre and regularly performed for Tennessee Repertory Theatre, Nashville Shakespeare Festival and others. (He left Nashville in 2006 to serve as founding artistic director at the Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre, and he currently teaches at Le Moyne College in upstate New York.)

With "Macbeth," Chiorini demonstrates a keen understanding and respect for the material, embracing both the elegance of Shakespeare's rich prose and the brutality of his characters.

This vision provides a solid foundation on which to build memorable performances. And Chiorini has assembled an outstanding cast.

Strong acting

Eric D. Pasto-Crosby cuts a commanding figure as Macbeth. He explores the language with enthusiasm, offering a performance that is remarkably subtle and nuanced.

Shannon Hoppe captures all the insidious strength of Lady Macbeth. From the moment she steps onstage, we instantly recognize her carefully controlled ruthlessness, which makes her descent into madness all the more satisfying.

Aaron Munoz makes a brilliant Nashville debut as the mighty Macduff, balancing the role's requisite ferocity with surprising tenderness. The pivotal scene in which he learns the fate of his family is raw and powerful.

Nashville Shakespeare Festival veteran Brian Webb Russell is well-cast as the benevolent King Duncan, and Jon Royal provides a strong presence as the ill-fated Banquo. Antonio P. Nappo is terrific as the nobleman Ross.

Dance sets it apart

One of the things that really set this production apart is the use of dance.

Nashville Ballet's Christopher Stuart provides thoughtful choreography, with dancers Aubrey Clayton, Emily Cloyd and Madeline Foderaro portraying the play's mysterious witches.

It's a rather bold move, and one that adds another layer to the already dynamic production. David Wilkerson also deserves credit for his realistic fight choreography.

The play's technical elements are just as striking, with images guaranteed to stay with you long after the curtain falls.

Jonathan Hammel's set design is simple yet effective, which contributes to the play's kinetic pace and sharp focus. Anne L. Willingham's lighting -- including a stunning solar eclipse -- is atmospheric and otherworldly.

Billy Ditty's costumes add to the overall effect, with color and texture helping to establish characters. Some of Lady Macbeth's gowns are particularly lovely, though I found the use of modern cargo pants on some of the men to be distracting.

Chiorini's sound design seems to filter out through the shadows, heightening the audience's sense of dread. And his decision to open Act II with Nine Inch Nails' "March of the Pigs" is an unexpected treat.

Full of scintillating performances and haunting imagery, "Macbeth" offers a promising beginning to Nashville Shakespeare Festival's 25th anniversary season.

If you go

What: The Nashville Shakespeare Festival presents "Macbeth"

When: Through Jan. 27. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, with 2:30 p.m. matinees on Sundays. (A sign language-interpreted performance is set for Jan. 19.)

Where: Belmont's Troutt Theater, 2100 Belmont Blvd.

Tickets: \$24 \$12 for students, \$21 for seniors)

Details: 615-852-6732, nashvilleshakes.org or ticketsnashville.com

Note: Recommended for ages 10 and up.

ONLINE

Go to Tennessean.com/entertainment, to see The Tennessean's Jan. 6 Portfolio cover story about Nashville

Shakespeare Festival's "Macbeth." Subscribers, please go to Tennessean.com/activate to access additional digital content.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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