

that play

a solo macbeth

REVIEWS

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by Di Jayawickrema
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There are two things you don't do inside a theater: wish somebody "good luck" before a show, and say the word "Macbeth." It is one of theater's longstanding superstitions that uttering "Macbeth" out of character will bring on sure disaster. Instead, actors refer to it as "The Scottish Play," "The Bard's Play," or simply, as actor/writer Tom Gualtieri does, "*That Play*." As either the world's most entertaining recap of Macbeth for someone who has never seen it, or a small master class in acting for those who love theater, *That Play* is a triumph. Between embodying 19 characters, Gualtieri offers swift summaries, wry asides, and asks for audience participation--but not too much of it, never fear--the stage belongs to him. Considering the show returns to Stage Left Studio now in its fifth extension, it seems Gualtieri can even say "Macbeth" without any fatal consequences.

For the 80-minute run of *That Play*, co-written with director Heather Hill, the only occupants of the small stage is the actor and one black box. Its bareness is a testament to the play's well-repaid faith in its performer. Gualtieri employs true theatrical sleight-of-hand, marking his quicksilver metamorphoses by characteristic physical cues--Lady Macbeth impatiently sweeping a leg behind her as she goads Macbeth to his bloody bid for the throne, Macbeth, uselessly trying to hold her off with a forbearing arm held aloft, Macduff, arms akimbo, righteously defending the realm.

It's a dizzying pleasure to watch Gualtieri dart in and out of the play. He abruptly cuts off Macbeth's blustering soliloquy after the murder of King Duncan with "He's talking way too much"--and promptly faints away as Lady Macbeth to distract the other characters. Also impressive is his emotional elasticity; the way he can breathe humor into the accents of the drunken porter and heartbreak into the cries of a bereaved Macduff with equal aplomb. And he doesn't just move between characters, he moves with them; changing his posture as Macbeth descends into madness, a slight bend in his back signaling the twist of Macbeth's soul, a terrible glint in his bloodshot eye.

Shakespeare's text has been dissected and analyzed to the bone, but one obvious thing that came forcefully home to me again as Gualtieri, mesmerizing as all three weird sisters, adds "the finger of a birth-strangled babe" to the witches' brew, is just how delectable his language is. It takes a skillful actor savoring each of the Bard's words before you to remind you that in his day, while theater had the power to thrill and to move, it was foremost supposed to be a really good time. When Tom Gualtieri first springs onto the stage, he opens: "Okay, I've got one." This man is here to entertain.

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by Aaron Leichter
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Shunning a set, props, and even supporting actors, Tom Gualtieri presents *That Play*, a speedy retelling of *Macbeth*. His version still has the witches, the general who kills his king to get the crown, the wife who's driven insane, and Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane. He even retains a fair amount of Shakespeare's poetry. But this is definitely Gualtieri's show: an 80-minute animated revision that catches all the twists and many of the characters. But the most important person isn't Macbeth, or even Lady Macbeth, it's a narrator who sketches in bits of Shakespeare's story that aren't acted out. Gualtieri's narrator addresses the audience with convivial assurance. Gualtieri himself is a skillful Shakespearean performer, his voice melodic yet understandable, his young open face conveying the inner lives of his characters.

Gualtieri's talent is especially notable in Lady Macbeth, a character that Gualtieri obviously adores. His performance doesn't mock femininity: he raises his register a few notches, clasps his pant leg like a

train, and poises himself regally. This performance is the highlight of the show, although it never overshadows his other characterizations. Gualtieri is careful to differentiate each role through voice, gesture and attitude, and, helped by director Heather Hill, he also defines a stage space and a tone for the most important parts. Setting Macbeth stage right and Macduff stage left creates a physical sense of opposition that matches the dramatic one.

That Play (the title's a reference to the curse that many theatre folk believe haunts *Macbeth*) revels in theatricality. More than a mere reduction of Shakespeare's play, this work stands on Shakespeare's shoulders while using some of his language. If it's occasionally a little self-indulgent, it earns indulgence from the audience too. At eighty minutes, *That Play* is good theatre... a showcase for a young actor with talent.