

that play

a solo macbeth

REVIEWS

Times Square Chronicle
by JK Clarke
April 2013

It is a rare feat to take such an oft performed and beloved Shakespeare play as Macbeth and put a new and unique twist on it. But that is exactly what Tom Gualtieri and Heather Hill have done with That Play: A Solo Macbeth. *[Okay, maybe not so unique now that Alan Cumming is opening his own version on Broadway; Gualtieri has been performing the piece on various stages since 2003, yet the Cumming production makes no mention of it in their notes or interviews . . . hmm, hurlyburly indeed.]*

Because the title and press kit gives it away, the production's "solo" component has already been absorbed by the time one arrives at the theater. It's hard to imagine how stunned an audience might be upon sitting for the performance and realizing there's just one man — Tom Gualtieri in this case — in the role of all 19 characters. That he pulls it off astonishingly well is just icing on the cake.

Clocking in at a very comfortable 80 minutes, it's obvious that we're not seeing the entirety of the text, and that's just fine. Gualtieri interrupts himself periodically with commentary about both the play and his performance of it. His asides are poignant and amusing — he's watching the play along with us. In essence, his 20th role is that of an audience member.

Most of Gualtieri's roles are delightfully nuanced. For the night Porter of the famous "Knock, knock!" scene, he transforms into a craggy, crippled with age, high pitched and sometimes shockingly profane curmudgeon; his Weird Sisters are all distinct personalities and voices, and, mercifully, not all "witchy" sounding. His preferred role, he tells us, is Lady Macbeth, and he captures her magnificently, lifting his loose pant leg for a splash of femininity and long dress effect. His Lady M is scheming, devious, and her eyes flash with delight at her husband's ill-gotten achievements; when she comes unravelled, she seems shocked by her own sense of guilt. The "Out damned spot" scene, often mis-played, is haunting and unsettling here. She is a complex and layered Lady M — as she should be — and Gualtieri is in her head more than any other character.

The performance feels less like a play than storytelling. Gualtieri is at times a dramaturg, explaining nuances of the piece: sometimes discussing setting, historical context or even his own feelings about the play. So we end up not just witnessing, but learning about the play.

It turns out that there is one prophecy from the Weird Sisters that didn't make it into the play: When one man doth become 19, shall Macbeth be triumphant.