

# Hinton's strong vision translates into suspenseless *Macbeth*

Despite some chilling visuals and atmosphere the Citadel's production conjures, it all fails to become an absorbing theatrical event

## theatre review

### Macbeth

Runs until 2 March

Directed by Peter Hinton

Starring Benedict Campbell and

Diane D'Aquila

Citadel Theatre

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Arts & Entertainment Staff

Two of the productions playing at the Citadel right now share some remarkable similarities: both are over-the-top melodramas with characters talking at people rather than to them; both seem art-directed first and directed second; both have a bit of trouble deciding where the accents of their choruses should be located; both, oddly enough, contain the expression "Screw your courage to the sticking place." But while these qualities are admirable in the campy fun of *Beauty and the Beast*, they just don't really work when applied to *Macbeth*.

Director Peter Hinton has transplanted Shakespeare's Scottish play to a 1940s World War II scenario with surprising ease. He clearly has a solid vision and goal for the show and puts considerable effort into establishing the atmosphere from the get-go, which works. It's a real mystery, then, why *Macbeth* never gets off the ground.

Benedict Campbell, as the title character, does a good job delivering the various indulgent monologues of the show, despite an incredibly unsettling resemblance to William Shatner. Diane D'Aquila, playing the lady of



the house, wrings countless emotions and subtleties from her unsettling and unsexing threats and speeches. The cast, for the most part—excluding the aforementioned accent troubles—are solid, committed, and visually monochrome. Carolyn M Smith's costumes are visually sumptuous, creating armies with six people, and while I personally hated Sandy Moore's original musical interludes, I can't deny that their jarring and unsettling rhythms communicated the chaos inherent to the story.

And yet it never clicks. It never transcends that line drawn through Shakespeare's canon between good and great. The cast simply can't

communicate well; almost all the lines, from the monologues to the verbal spars, are delivered with the audience in mind. No one talks to each other in this play, and that just sucks the humanity right out.

Hinton's vision comes off as short-sighted when it comes to some of the smaller details, like the witches. No doubt everyone's seen the poster with the creepy identical *Children of the Corn* kids on it. Those are the witches. And for the first half, the haunting kid thing works remarkably well. The three youngsters come across as Holocaust-displaced orphans, with just enough of a hint of the supernatural about them that

*Macbeth's* paranoia can drive the story the rest of the way. Once the second half starts, however, Hinton's decision to do the final witch scene as a Lynchian dream sequence seemed completely out of place. The open introduction of the fantastic ruins the suspense and disbelief that the kids had been quietly establishing so far. Between smoking trapdoors, talking dolls, a march of dead kings, a topless prophet, and falling, deflated dodgeballs. The only thing more confusing than this five-minute mess is the unsettling and seemingly inaccurate final image of the show.

There's still a lot to like about the play, from the effective minimalist set

to the strong lead performances. But one final suggestion to Hinton and Co: if you're going to have a bloodstain left onstage from *Macbeth's* first murder, that's great; it's a strong image that underlies the guilt in our hero's mind. If you're going to have the entire cast ignore the stain and indeed walk over it for the rest of the show, well, it could work, albeit some of the magic will be gone. But if the lights and setting are going to ignore it as well, suddenly it's not a strong image any more. It's laziness. And that's one quality that I can't stand in any piece of theatre. Not in *Beauty and the Beast* and definitely not in *Macbeth*.

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