

Machbeth

The Press (yorkpress.co.uk) – Sat 21 Nov 2009

Review

THE PRESS

Charles Hutchinson reviews *Machbeth* at the Hull Truck Theatre

9:40am Saturday 21st November 2009

THE new £15 million Hull Truck Theatre has just been named the Best Public Building in Britain by judges of the 2009 Brick Awards.

So architects Wright & Wright have definitely got the building right but, ironically, not every production has looked at home in the main house, as the company acclimatises to its new, bigger surroundings.

Hull Truck artistic director Gareth Tudor Price has made a significant decision by staging *Machbeth* in the round, with the bank of seating behind the stage enhancing the claustrophobia that grips this revival of his modern-day adaptation, first staged at the old Hull Truck in 2006. Do not be surprised if further productions follow suit in using this setting.

Better still is Gareth's decision to lower the height of the lighting rig, again intensifying the clammy claustrophobia while imposing a threatening physicality, even though Richard Foxton's stage amounts to nothing more than a raised wooden floor surrounded by chairs, on which cast members sit when not performing.

Or, more to the point, when seated, they provide sound effects, such as pounding feet, or the gibbering voices of the witches, as if in a state of trance.

Tudor Price has taken his blade to Shakespeare's bloody tale, trimming it to an hour each half, giving the Porter's Knock Knock lines to Seyton, and cutting out all the children and women bar Lady *Machbeth* (Lady Macduff's death is signified solely by a chilling scream).

Above all, the Witches are not seen in physical form; instead the supernatural soliciting comes from within *Machbeth*'s head or from the murky, all pervasive mists that cloak the stage throughout.

This Scotland is as rotten as Hamlet's Denmark, a primal place where sorcery and possession by the devil (or those midnight hags) is stronger than the sword.

It is a hellish place, that hell further emphasised by Graham Kirk's lighting also emerging from below, either as white light or red at moments of murder, as the light bleeds through grills on the stage. This is lighting worthy of a nomination in the regional theatre awards as it is like an extra character in the play.

Cage fighting, the Ring cycle of horror movies and leather-clad gothic rock shows all come to mind in Tudor Price's *Machbeth* yet nothing overshadows Shakespeare's language or indeed the performances of his superb cast.

Reprising their roles from 2006, James Weaver and Fiona Wass are an even more potent combination as *Machbeth* and Lady *Machbeth*. Madness stalks them both; she goes from seductress to primal-screaming

wretch; he goes beyond the summit of ambition to mental exhaustion, even slashing his wife's palm in his loss of all control.

The language is volatile, the fighting brutal, and Scotland's future looks no safer in Malcolm's hands at the finale as the witches' voices still echo all around. Bloody but brilliant, something wickedly good this way comes in the best show yet at the new Hull Truck.

Machbeth, Hull Truck Theatre, Hull, until November 28. Box office: 01482 323638.

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