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Macbeth

by Daniel Scheffler

EDGE Contributor

Friday Apr 26, 2013

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Alan Cumming in 'Macbeth'

"Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires" Macbeth cries as Shakespeare's most famous play, "**Macbeth**," comes to Broadway starring the Scottish Tony Award winner Alan Cumming. Once called "a frolicky pansexual sex symbol for the new millennium" in Oasis Magazine, the actor seemingly is perfect to take on Macbeth in all his fury and madness.

Cumming, not new to the stage, overly ambitiously tackles this role with some staggering results over all. But, without the devastation and a true exploring of a darkest, darkest night kind of madness, this version, albeit clever, of "Macbeth" feels trite.

Audiences meet the witches on the heath in a modernized setting, a slightly decayed mental

institution, and they come in the form of doctors addressing Macbeth's madness. The script, with its genuine look at mental instability and sickness, has been cleverly adapted away from an olden-day setting to this clinical and ever-more scary stage.

And so Alan Cumming takes on, in true schizophrenic lulls, almost all the characters in the play as he battles his own demons vehemently through each of them. Lady Macbeth, with her signature "Come, you spirits of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood," tries to creep out of Cumming's pores but he doesn't manage to portray her innate ambition through anything more than just a couple of blood



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drops as the play gushes forth.

As Lady Macbeth and Macbeth's ambitious natures emerge early on in the play, his inability to ever return to a normal state is what makes the narrative of the play "Macbeth" so powerful. In contrast to him, Lady Macbeth questions her actions, and even her morals, but it is Macbeth who has gone too far.

But without the devastation and a true exploring of a darkest darkest night kind of madness this version, albeit clever, of Macbeth feels trite.

He kills and kills some more and eventually cannot stop himself even if he desires to return to the life before his kingdom. Unfortunately the distinction between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth is made by a mere campy play for Lady M and much of a muchness rage for Mr. M.

Cumming, unable to help himself, played at a lot of the text opposed to actually allowing the magic of Macbeth to infuse the theatre. His inability to actually tell Shakespeare's story became a hindrance as he threw himself in and out of every imaginable section of his personality and possibly some learnt personas. There was so reason for this as it did not aid the production in any way and felt like a "showing off" of his big guns.

Unable to fully embody any of the characters on a grounded human level, Cumming was hindered by some of the director's instructions that may have been constituted "keep moving" and "run all over the stage." The magic of Macbeth, the true magical element, was disguised as Macbeth's madness was substituted for perhaps a slight mental illness.

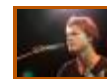
On a visceral level, the feeling of long days' rehearsing was probably what gave the play a serious lacking of true gut feel and emotional intelligence. Calculated and near perfect is not the Macbeth that Shakespeare ever intended, and Cumming somewhat missed the intensity of Macbeth's greatest flaw: his inability to see clearly, ever again.

As the body count keeps going up, it is the element of sleep that traps Macbeth in his mind. Cumming manages to portray that self-entrapment smartly as he ventures into a bath, dismally washing himself adrift at sea. Macbeth, the loony that he was, could "sleep no more," which, as insomnia goes, becomes the worst kind of all-consuming venom that allows for nothing to be set or organized any longer. This is where Cumming really missed the point of Shakespeare's darkest tragedy as he spun himself carefully into a little bundle of unease -- but not into the true madness and rage of Macbeth.

As Macbeth productions go, this will remain a modern version of the classic tale and be revered for cleverly handling the material in a new, and very much relevant, way. Elements such as a baby doll and a tiny sweater to allude to his children are cleverly used. But Cumming's nudity, perhaps intentionally, felt egotistical opposed to natural given the script of the play. This, with three curtain calls, sealed a certain level of conceit that was left like blood on the audience's hands by Mr.



In response to the tragic events at yesterday's Boston Marathon, general admission to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), will be free to the public today, Tuesday, April 16.



Benjamin Scheuer

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Benjamin Scheuer's songwriting series soothes at the Cornelia Street Cafe in Greenwich Village, New York.



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By Jake Mulligan | Apr 26

Michael Bay brings together a team of scumbag personal trainers to kidnap one of their clients, kill him and steal his fortune. Unfortunately for them, he survives.



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Cumming.

"Macbeth" runs through July 14 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, 243 West 47th Street in Manhattan. For tickets or information, call 212-239-6200 or go to macbethonbroadway.com

Daniel Scheffler is a writer who spends his time in New York, Cape Town and India. Follow him on Twitter @danielscheffler

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