

Murder as a way of life

Macbeth

By William Shakespeare
Directed by Melody Brooks
New Perspectives Theatre Company
Washington Square Church
135 West 4th Street (730-2030)

The New Perspectives production of *Macbeth* featured some intelligent reconsiderations of the play, and it also included the extraordinarily fine Macbeth of **George Spencer**. With the audience seated along the side walls of the sanctuary, the whole floor area was well-used for battles and seductions, as well as being forest and court. The altar area also served as a staging area for banquets, entrances, and exits, and sound carried beautifully from there. But otherwise, if an actor was not facing in an auditor's direction, his voice got lost in the lofty space up to the ceiling. Which was a damn shame, because there was enough evidence otherwise that this was a wise and thoughtful presentation.

So on to the high points. Director **Melody Brooks** took the tack that Macbeth is the legitimate heir to the throne, murder being a commonplace method of getting what you want (then as now!). So killing Duncan was not the problem, but the guy doesn't feel right about what he did, and he thinks that makes him a coward – hence the subsequent bloodletting, to convince himself (and others) otherwise. And this approach worked in no small measure because of the strong, kingly performance of Spencer. He was a powerful force to be reckoned with, and in other circumstances would have been a majestic king. But of course, fate – and Shakespeare – have other plans.

Brooks also put together some smashing visuals – battle scenes were staged with a slow stylization that let the actors act at the same time they were battling (fight choreography by **Nicole Godino**); the Ariel-like witches (**Monica Asencio, Annemieke Marie Farrow, John Carlos Cantu**) crawling all over Macbeth and Banquo (**Adam Larmer**); stop-action at the banquet table as Macbeth pondered “If it were done when 'tis

done....” And of *course* Macbeth and the others would be naked under their night clothes – they've just been roused out of bed. The murder of Banquo was well choreographed, as was the slaughter of the fiery Lady MacDuff (**DeAnna Gonzales**) and her son. Duncan (**John Canary**) was quite kingly himself, but much of **C. Amanda Maud's** Lady Macbeth was lost to the heavens of the church. She could have used a little more of the spunk she showed after the murder (“What! In our house?!”), but here she was the spouse caught up in events, not their instigator, and perhaps she was right to be petulant when, for example, Macbeth acts out when he sees Banquo's ghost. And that was another terrific visual – eight or so blank-masked Banquos set around the audience gave an eerie resonance to the scene.

Of necessity the set was minimal, but the costumes had that rarest of qualities – the dark-colored tunics and cloaks so well complemented the actors' movements and seemed so natural that they became part of the characters, not a distraction (production design by **Meganne George**). The large banks of gelled lights (designed by **Amy C. Harper**) were mood-settingly effective, although some upper reaches of the altar were underlit.

With so much going for it, it was a pity of the highest order that some of the poetry was unintelligible – particularly since it was not the fault of these fine actors. There was a strong and fierce *Macbeth* fighting to get heard through the muffle. (Aside to New Perspectives: when do we get to see Spence as Othello?)

Also with **Jose Aranda, Erwin Falcon, Sabah El-Amin, Jennifer Watters, Trip Bowen, Tim Farley, Al Choy, Kathy Gail MacGowan, E. Calvin Ahn.**

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