

Bloody, brutal, electrifying

“Macbeth” delivers an unflinching study in ruthless ambition.

By **Toby Zinman**
FOR THE INQUIRER

The “butcher and his fiend-like queen” stalk the boards again in this thrilling and savage production of *Macbeth* at the Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre. Director Carmen Khan has wisely cast for voices: This is a cast with perfect diction and powerful resonance. The actors speak the lines as if it were their native tongue; Kahn knows that the drama is in language, and they deliver it.

Theater Review

The plot is a study in ruthless ambition, showing us that *ruthless* means, literally, without pity. Once the three witches pour the prophecy into Macbeth’s ear, promising him the throne, he will stop at nothing; murder follows murder until finally, he is “in blood, stepped so far” that there is nothing to do but keep killing.

Rob Kahn’s Macbeth is a burly warrior with a veneer of courtly grandeur, but he’s a thug at heart. His madness — the frenzy as he is pursued by his hallucinations — is utterly convincing. Kahn’s “To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow” speech is terrific: Shaking his fist at God, he has gone way past tragic to existential disgust.

Annabel Capper’s Lady Macbeth is the brains of this power couple, and from the first, she seems a little unhinged, revealing an intensity that makes her literally vibrate. She quivers as if she were electrified with the opportunity before them to seize the throne. It’s a performance that starts high and stays there until the queen goes mad.

The rest of the cast is every bit as good: Josh Kachnycz as Malcolm; Eric Van Wie as both Banquo and the drunken Porter, who answers the famous knock at the gate; and William LeDent in the heartwrenching role of Macduff.



Philadelphia

Shakespeare Theatre’s “Macbeth” stars Rob Kahn in the title role and Annabel Capper as Lady Macbeth, the quivering brains of the power couple.

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A fight scene between Kahn’s Macbeth (left) and William LeDent’s Macduff. The fight choreography is convincing, a feat on a small stage.

The witches (Julia Ray, Elise Hudson, and Sarah Stryker) are terrific and turn out to be gorgeous as guests at the royal banquet, and John Zak, usually seen in comic roles, is a lovely and dignified Duncan. Filling out the company are Jenna Kuerzi, Adam Kampouris, Deaon Griffin-Pressley, Michael Gamache, and Alexander Eltzroth.

The music and sound design by Fabian Obispo lends urgency to the play, and Vickie Esposito’s costumes are convincingly medieval. The props (Louise Grafton) — lots of swords, blood, and fire

in the air — never become too showy, and Michael Cosenza’s fight choreography looks convincing. It’s not an easy thing to stage battles on a small stage with big swords.

If you want a high-concept *Macbeth* (as so many are), this is not the show for you. If you want straight-up Shakespeare, go see this one.

Through May 22 at the Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre, 2111 Sansom St. Tickets: \$20-\$45. Information: 215-496-8001, www.phillyshakespeare.org.