

## Review: Macbeth

By AF Harrold

BBC Berkshire reviews Macbeth at the Shinfield Players Theatre, Friday 9 March 2007.

This production in the spacious Shinfield Theatre of Shakespeare's dark and bloody Scottish tragedy is very good in parts.

The set is simple but remarkably effective and effectively used, some dark archways, steps and ensconced armoury on the walls and is really brought to life, as the whole play is, by brilliant lighting.

Never is a cue missed nor a scene arbitrarily lit – it is clear a lot of thought has gone into this and it is to the credit of Martin Terrell that the play looks so good all the way through.

Arguably, what's most important with Shakespeare, however, are the words and these were for the most part clearly presented.

There was some good acting in the supporting roles, particularly in the Macbeth's maid (Janine Coelle), Malcolm (Sam Kozlowski), Ross (Mikhail Franklin) and Macduff (Steve Crompton).

The Three Weird Sisters were given a nice, if traditional, bringing to life (plenty of smoke, green light and high cackling voices), and Banquo had some wonderfully effective make up when re-appearing as his own ghost – most horrific.

The most interesting, arresting and novel thing about this production, however, was Heidi Ashton's Lady Macbeth.

So often do we see stereotypical Madly Macbeths, that we forget there is another option. Instead of opting for yet another severe, thin, cold woman in a pure white dress (usually played so severe that it's no wonder the Macbeth's have no heirs).

Tonight, instead, we get a more womanly, motherly reading from the less than anorexic Ashton, dressed in creams for the most part, softening all her edges and providing something that the audience can understand and empathise with easier, perhaps.

It was very good to see, and some of her scenes were both effective and affective in equally measure, especially her final, sleepwalking scene, which was played beautifully quietly and subtly.

So, all in all this was a well presented version of the Scottish play, with some jolly good sword fighting, plenty of blood, gore and atmosphere, and some fine performances.