

REVIEW: A spellbinding 'Macbeth' at Salem State

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Dec 5, 2017 at 12:06 PM

Updated Dec 5, 2017 at 12:08 PM

The idea of “Macbeth” has always been just as important as the play itself. And ideas abound in director Kate Kohler Amory’s solid production of Shakespeare’s tragedy, onstage now in the Sophia Gordon Center at Salem State University.

The deeply psychological motives and insecurities that drive the title character and his ruthless wife have allowed directors to take presentations of “Macbeth” in many different directions. But in Amory’s re-working, the witches define the parameters of the Macbeths’ ambition and guilt. Amory’s concept gets a visual and aural treatment that uses every bit of SSU’s new performance hall, and her players invest Shakespeare’s rich language and characterizations with energy.

Samuel Nudler stars as Macbeth, and Macey Jennings as his wife and queen. A dozen or so actors fill the remaining roles, with many doublings, along with a generous and welcome ignoring of gender casting.

The witches rarely leave the action, and certainly never leave the imagination. Ilisa Flum, Shannon Keelan, Sophie Leiton Toomey and Courtney Plati (shifting roles) dress wildly and act even more outrageously. They bring a convincing portrayal of the seers who drive Macbeth into believing his fate, and precipitate the bloody actions that make it all come true.

Amory hasn’t changed the script, just the implications. The witches hiss approval and disapproval during various scenes, scenes that do not normally include them in the script, and their classic onstage seances are spiced with captivating choreography, supercharged costuming (Jerry L. Johnson, with Charlie Kellogg doing makeup), and inventive playing.

Music (Ryan Blaney, sound design and composition) plays an important role in the mood. It sometimes takes an excessively melodramatic role, but almost always sounds innovative, creating a rich atmosphere.

Making use of the hall seemed a priority, and was pulled off organically. Actors entered down the aisles, played in the front and up in the balconies, and generally made the audience feel like the action took place everywhere.

The sets were impressive, but over-managed: tall risers and towers, fabricated from metal, served for most of the scenes. They frequently were shifted about — expertly done, and showing off the Gordon Center’s impressive technical abilities. But most of the set changes seemed to have no dramatic purpose.

The language — always a challenge in Shakespeare, whose plays are the greatest English, but no longer natural English — was impressively executed. Certainly some actors were working too hard just to remember their complex lines, and sounded wooden. But Nudler as Macbeth, Nikos Koutsogiannis (multiple roles as Duncan, Siward, and others), Claudia Cruz (Hecate, Porter) and the witches all made some of the most stylized lines — and some of the most famous — sound idiomatic.

The doubling of roles proved a problem at times. It’s fine when actors take on multiple characters, but to have them play different speaking roles in consecutive scenes creates too much of a believability problem for audiences.

But overall, the concept and execution worked splendidly. Amory gets her players to buy in enthusiastically to her notion, and with the witches serving as a kind of psychedelic Greek chorus, this “Macbeth” lives up to its bloody potential.

“Macbeth” runs through Dec. 10 at the Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts, 356 Lafayette St., Salem State University. For tickets and information visit salemstatet.edu/arts or call 978-542-6365.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com.



SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL

Wake up to the day’s top news, delivered to your inbox

REVIEW: A spellbinding ‘Macbeth’ at Salem State

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Dec 5, 2017 at 12:06 PM

Updated Dec 5, 2017 at 12:08 PM

The idea of “Macbeth” has always been just as important as the play itself. And ideas abound in director Kate Kohler Amory’s solid production of Shakespeare’s tragedy, onstage now in the Sophia Gordon Center at Salem State University.

The deeply psychological motives and insecurities that drive the title character and his ruthless wife have allowed directors to take presentations of “Macbeth” in many different directions. But in Amory’s re-working, the witches define the parameters of the Macbeths’ ambition and guilt. Amory’s concept gets a visual and aural treatment that uses every bit of SSU’s new performance hall, and her players invest Shakespeare’s rich language and characterizations with energy.

Samuel Nudler stars as Macbeth, and Macey Jennings as his wife and queen. A dozen or so actors fill the remaining roles, with many doublings, along with a generous and welcome ignoring of gender casting.

The witches rarely leave the action, and certainly never leave the imagination. Ilisa Flum, Shannon Keelan, Sophie Leiton Toomey and Courtney Plati (shifting roles) dress wildly and act even more outrageously. They bring a convincing portrayal of the seers who drive Macbeth into believing his fate, and precipitate the bloody actions that make it all come true.

Amory hasn’t changed the script, just the implications. The witches hiss approval and disapproval during various scenes, scenes that do not normally include them in the script, and their classic onstage seances are spiced with captivating choreography, supercharged costuming (Jerry L. Johnson, with Charlie Kellogg doing makeup), and inventive playing.

Music (Ryan Blaney, sound design and composition) plays an important role in the mood. It sometimes takes an excessively melodramatic role, but almost always sounds innovative, creating a rich atmosphere.

Making use of the hall seemed a priority, and was pulled off organically. Actors entered down the aisles, played in the front and up in the balconies, and generally made the audience feel like the action took place everywhere.

The sets were impressive, but over-managed: tall risers and towers, fabricated from metal, served for most of the scenes. They frequently were shifted about — expertly done, and showing off the Gordon Center’s impressive technical abilities. But most of the set changes seemed to have no

dramatic purpose.

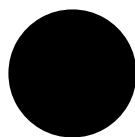
The language — always a challenge in Shakespeare, whose plays are the greatest English, but no longer natural English — was impressively executed. Certainly some actors were working too hard just to remember their complex lines, and sounded wooden. But Nudler as Macbeth, Nikos Koutsogiannis (multiple roles as Duncan, Siward, and others), Claudia Cruz (Hecate, Porter) and the witches all made some of the most stylized lines — and some of the most famous — sound idiomatic.

The doubling of roles proved a problem at times. It's fine when actors take on multiple characters, but to have them play different speaking roles in consecutive scenes creates too much of a believability problem for audiences.

But overall, the concept and execution worked splendidly. Amory gets her players to buy in enthusiastically to her notion, and with the witches serving as a kind of psychedelic Greek chorus, this “Macbeth” lives up to its bloody potential.

“Macbeth” runs through Dec. 10 at the Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts, 356 Lafayette St., Salem State University. For tickets and information visit salemstatet.edu/arts or call 978-542-6365.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com.



SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL

Wake up to the day's top news, delivered to your inbox
