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# SFist Reviews: We Players' 'Macbeth'

Here's the first thing you should know about Fort Point after dark: even if you've been sweating like porcine on one of San Francisco's hottest weekends, come nightfall you will still be shrouded in freezing mist, whipped by cyclonic winds and dripped on by condensation from the Golden Gate Bridge towering overhead. Do not, as I did, wear a thin (but cute!) chambray shirt and sandals, but rather take your cues from the better-informed visitors getting jealous stares all evening: fleece gloves, knit hats, and mountain-ready outerwear are a must when attending the theatrical troupe We Players' immersive performance of *Macbeth*.

I didn't quite realize this when I checked in at the imposing gates of the fort(ress). "Do you have something warmer to wear?" asked the concerned Shakespearean clipboard-holder. "Oh yes!" I lied, panicking. "Do you have to use the bathroom? There are no bathrooms inside the Fort, and we'll be locked in for three hours." "Nope, I'm good" I lied again. And so it was underclothed and over-hydrated that I was herded into the fort and the doors closed ominously behind us.

Luckily, creature discomforts suit this play. After seeing We Players' production, it's almost hard to imagine watching *MacBeth*'s murderous rise and fall from cushy indoor seat. *Macbeth* is a creepy, tragic play, and here those themes are

echoed in every dimly lit corner, freezing stone surface and winding staircase. The setting is the star in this production, which enacts Shakespeare's infamous "Scottish play" throughout the courtyard, passageways and corners of the Civil War-era fort, punctuated by a persistent fog horn and the crashing of waves.

We Players is the company that staged Hamlet on Alcatraz, Twelfth Night at the Hyde Street Pier and The Odyssey on Angel Island, and their use of open spaces is inspired. Don't expect an interactive experience on par with Punchdrunk's Macbethian 'Sleep No More', however: this is much more straightforward theater, albeit creatively staged. The audience is split into two groups that are guided by captains around the fort, sometimes watching a scene together, sometimes in separate groups. Watching an intimate, candlelit scene in one of the fort's dark corners while hearing the screams and shouts of a concurrently unfolding scene is one of the production's pleasures.

Mackenzie Drae plays a youthful, handsome Macbeth, credibly devolving into wide-eyed paranoia and homicidal mania, and Artistic Director Ava Roy is a hardened Lady Macbeth with whom it's hard to find much sympathy (but why would you want to?). A mustachioed Benjamin Stowe plays Macduff, whose fight with Macbeth takes on cinematic excitement as the two battle against railings, race up stairways and duel with swords and daggers across a fog-swept roof. The Weird Sisters, played by Julie Douglas, Caroline Parsons and Maria Leigh, were wonderfully creepy and their infamous "double, double, toil and trouble" scene was elevated from witchy clichés by truly skin-crawling staging.

Another affecting moment was during the banquet scene, where audience members crowd a long table and snack on bread, fruit and cheese. Macbeth, haunted by the bloody ghost of Banquo (played by Nikolas Strubbe), advances down the tabletop, gibbering and raving. As Banquo's ghost hovers at the far end of the table, the foghorn moans and the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. I forgot all about being cold and needing to pee: at Fort Point, ghosts have never felt more real.

### *MacBeth at Fort Point*

*Thursdays-Sundays at 6 p.m., until October 6*

Note: We Player's Saturday shows are sold out.