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Review: 'Macbeth At Fort Point' by We Players (*****)

(Charles Kruger (<http://www.stormingbohemia.com>))

(Rating: ***** (<http://wp.me/p1Jd74-dq>))

This reviewer is a voting associate member of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle (SFBATCC) (<https://theatrestorm.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/sfbatcc-new-logo2.jpg>)

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worth its blood has distinguishing characteristics.

("Macbeth At Fort Point" plays through June 29, 2014 at Fort Point National Historic Site.)

Some theatre experiences are remembered for a lifetime: "Macbeth At Fort Point" is likely to be one of those. Those fortunate enough to attend this extraordinary event (it is more than a play) will be revisiting the memories for years to come.

"Macbeth" is one of Shakespeare's most fascinating plays for many discerning critics (<http://openliterature.net/2011/05/02/john-boe-the-tragedy-of-macbeth-modern-criticism-and-critical-controversies/>) and audiences. Flawed, certainly, and difficult to get right in performance, it has some of the bard's richest, most romantic and enigmatic poetry, an astonishing love story, supernatural horror, philosophical depth, exciting battles, and more. It rewards endless examination, and endless variety in production. There has been a fascist Macbeth (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1570337/>), a Voodoo Macbeth (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1570337/>) (directed by Orson Welles), a sexy Macbeth ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macbeth_\(1971_film\)#Technical_style](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macbeth_(1971_film)#Technical_style)) (Roman Polanski famously filmed both the witches and Lady Macbeth in the nude) and more. There has even been an authentically Scottish Macbeth (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JLdA7QECiw>) (Sean Connery). Every Macbeth

In We Players' thrilling enactment, the stars of the show are Fort Point (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Point,_San_Francisco), the San Francisco fog, and the mighty roar of the Pacific. They give unforgettable performances, supported by a fine professional cast of actors with good Shakespearean chops and superbly realized visuals and music that blend perfectly with the site.



(<https://theatrestorm.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/screen-shot-2014-06-15-at-4-36-43-pm.png>)

John Hadden as Macbeth intimately engages the audience. Photo Credit: We Players.

Construction on Fort Point began in 1853 and took eight years to complete. It was nearly destroyed to make way for the Golden Gate Bridge in the 1930s, but the bridge's engineer, Joseph Strauss, recognized its architectural importance and insisted on its preservation as a national monument. It is interesting to speculate that Strauss, a poet himself (<http://goldengatebridge.org/research/ConstructionStraussPoem.php>), would be pleased with We Players' production of Macbeth. In fact, I like to imagine that his ghost attends each performance. I hope so. There ought to be one good ghost at Dunsinane to keep the audience safe.

This production will be exciting for any audience, but those already familiar with Macbeth will be especially pleased. When the large iron doors were opened and we crowded into the cold, foggy interior of the fort with its gothic masonry arches and damp floors, I thought, "Oh my God, I'm walking into Dunsinane" and my shivers of horror were real.



<https://theatrestorm.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/screen-shot-2014-06-15-at-4-44-25-pm.png>

Lady Macbeth (Ava Roy) sleepwalks through the dank corridors of Dunsinane (Fort Point). Photo Credit: We Players.

It seems that every nook and cranny of the old fort is utilized by director and star, John Hadden. Sometimes, the audience surrounds the actors in the large open courtyard with the battlements towering above. At other moments, scenes are played almost simultaneously on balconies on opposite sides of the courtyard or at either end literally hundreds of feet apart. The sense of reality and sheer size could not be matched in any theatre and it is dazzling.

The audience moves about continuously, throughout the fort, prodded and guided by two attentive Captains. We climbed up and down narrow and winding staircases, stood on balconies in the moonlight looking down at a convincing battle (with lit torches being tossed through the air and the clanging of swords echoing in the fog) and attended a banquet (where we were at the table ourselves, and fed) in the company of a mad king and a bloody ghost. We entered the bedchamber of the Queen, and passed the candlelit alcove where the bloody corpses of King Duncan and his guards revealed how "confusion now hath made his masterpiece". We surrounded the witches in a close circle as they concocted their famous brew of "toil and trouble" and some of us, I'm sure, actually felt a pricking in our thumbs when Macbeth approached. And that's only a sample.



(<https://theatrestorm.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/screen-shot-2014-06-15-at-4-38-27-pm.png>)

The Weyard Sisters (Julie Douglas, Maria Leigh, Caroline Parsons) concoct their witches' brew. Photo Credit: We Players.

The fabulous props and set decorations of Rachel Bergquist and the subtle, unobtrusive and effective lighting by Joe D'Emilio and Joey Postil are grandly effective as is the original score composed by Charlie Gurke and performed by an excellent ensemble. And then, there is the ominous fog, the sound of the waves and the foghorn, the whistling wind, and the cold hard stone masonry of the Fort to complete the experience.

The setting and staging are the stars of this production, without a doubt, and the emphasis is not on great acting. Co-directors John Hadden and Ava Roy play Macbeth and his Lady competently but not thrillingly. They are particularly effective in the scene before the royal banquet, when Lady Macbeth realizes how her husband has changed, and that she has lost her lover (whom she once described as "too full of the milk of human kindness") to ever more bloody thoughts and fantasies.

The rest of the cast are fine, and vocally impressive as they fill the huge playing space. The fight scenes, as choreographed by Benjamin Stoe, are athletically executed. Steve Boss makes a lot of his dual performance as King Duncan and The Porter, the latter of whom you will indeed remember.

This is truly a production not to be missed. Bloody good fun!

For further information click [here](http://www.weplayers.org/macbeth-at-fort-point-tickets) (<http://www.weplayers.org/macbeth-at-fort-point-tickets>).

“Macbeth at Fort Point”, by William Shakespeare, produced by Lauren D. Chavez and Ava Roy for We Players, in collaboration with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Co-Directors: Ava Roy and John Hadden. Properties & Set Artisan: Rachel Bergquist. Lighting Designers: Joe D’Emilio and Joey Postil. Fight Choreographer: Benjamin Stowe. Composer & Music Director: Charlie Gurke.

Cast

Captian Lennox: Jennie Brick. Weyard Sisters: Julie Douglas, Maria Leigh, Caroline Parsons, Duncan/Porter: Steve Boss. Macduff: Dixon Phillips. Malcolme: Kevin Singer. Ross: Nathaniel Justianiano. Bloody Captain/Captain Menteth: Scott Ragle. Macbeth: John Hadden. Banquo: Jack Halton. Lady Macbeth: Ava Roy. Macduff Child & Fleance: alternately Mae Capron & Lila Popell. Murderer: Carmen-Maria-Mandley. Lady Macduff: Brandice Thompson.

Musicians

Percussion: Brent Elberg. Trumpet: Aaron Priskorn. Saxophone: Charlie Gurke. Trombone: alternately RickBrown and Mara Fox.

Seargeants Butler & Train (audience support): variously Ben Capron, Christine Chesko, Greg Estes, Monica Herbert, Lauren Matley, Rebecca Popell, Ruth Tringham.

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