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Shutdown may mean 'Macbeth's' last hour upon the stage

By **Vivian Ho**

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Nikolas Strubbe from the We Players, a Bay Area theater troupe, during a performance of Macbeth at the Civil War parade ground in the Presidio on October 4th 2013. The group was forced to move from their regular space at Fort Point due to the government shutdown.

Sam Wolson/Special to the Chronicle

Lady Macbeth stood on the lawn at the Presidio's Main Post, blood not yet on her hands but ambition clear in her eyes.

As the sun set, she greeted the dozens seated in a circle around her with a speech not from her own Shakespearean tragedy, but from "[Henry V](#)" – with a few notable changes.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers – for he today that shares this play with me will be my brother," she said. "And gentlemen in Congress now abed, will think themselves accursed and hold their manhoods cheap!"

It was a fitting introduction to the start of a fifth week of "Macbeth" performances by the city's We Players, who hadn't planned to be in the Presidio.

The power struggles and ruthless ambition they often depict played out in real life this week when the federal government shutdown closed the [National Park Service's](#) Fort Point – the interactive stage at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge where they had rehearsed and charted out each scene for nearly a year.

In just a few days, the cast and crew had to find a new location, while reshuffling an elaborate presentation in which the audience had followed the ranging actors around the fort.

Their partners in the Park Service helped them finagle a new setting at the Main Post, which is operated by the [Presidio Trust](#) and still open during the shutdown.

Play traditionally cursed

Just hours before their first show Thursday night, they were briefly allowed back into Fort Point to retrieve props and costumes.

"The quote from 'Macbeth' is, 'Be bloody, bold and resolute,' " said [Lauren Chavez](#), who co-produced the play and acted as Lady Macduff. "We're not being bloody, but w

and resolute. We put a year's worth of work into creating a really beautiful performance and we're going to share what we can of it."

In theater lore, of course, "Macbeth" is a cursed play, bringing disaster to any production if someone speaks the title aloud in a theater. Stagings of "Macbeth" seem to attract calamity – though a government shutdown was beyond what any of the We Players thought possible.

A last-minute change in venue was especially devastating for We Players, whose specialty is incorporating setting into performance. Fort Point wasn't just a stage but also the star, director and inspiration.

Built around the set

"All of our shows are built so carefully around the set," said [Ava Roy](#), who co-produced and co-directed the show and played Lady Macbeth. "I studied the traffic patterns, the weather patterns, the ambient noise around Fort Point for a year before we chose it as our location."

The crew designed the costumes to fit the Civil War-era fort – which fortunately translated to the Presidio's Civil War Parade Ground Lawn.

As battle drums and trumpets sounded through the chilly air Thursday night, the audience was transfixed by the weyrd sisters' every slithering move, Macbeth and Macduff's swashbuckling sword-fighting and Lady Macbeth's descent into raving madness.

But the crowd was thin. Though Thursday's show had sold out at Fort Point, only about two-thirds of the audience redeemed tickets. We Players offered refunds for the rest, something Chavez said the company can't afford.

"As a young and growing arts nonprofit, we really rely on ticket sales," she said. "It will be really financially devastating to the organization if we can't get back into the fort."

Late Friday, the crew was still deciding whether to hold another performance Saturday on the lawn, said production assistant [Briana Dickinson](#). There are supposed to be si

if the shutdown doesn't end soon, the group may cancel all of them.

On a positive note, Dickinson said, the relocated show created a unique opportunity to enhance the meaning of the play.

"The message to be heard is a clear parallel to what we're seeing with the U.S. government," she said. "Here you may see the tyrant."

SHUTDOWN – DAY 5

Effects of the shutdown

Dining out: [Cliff House](#), a park service concessionaire, closed.

Running: Bridge to Bridge Run on Sunday in S.F. is rerouted, shortened to avoid federal land.

Organic foods: Inspectors who check on organic standards furloughed.

Airplane inspections: FAA safety inspectors furloughed.

Workplace safety: Most occupational health and safety inspections halted.

E-Verify: Website for employers checking workers' immigration status goes offline.

California [National Guard](#): Weekend training suspended.

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Vivian Ho has worked for the San Francisco Chronicle since 2011, covering crime and breaking news as a Go Team reporter with a desk in the Hall of Justice. She reported on Black Lives Matter demonstrations, the Occupy movement, the Napa earthquake, the Rim Fire and the World Series riots as well as on homicides, criminal street gangs, sexual assaults, domestic violence cases and police personnel matters. She also writes for Chronicle Watch, a weekly column exploring stubborn issues in the Bay Area. Before she joined The Chronicle, Vivian reported for the Boston Globe and the Worcester Telegram and Gazette. Vivian spent most of her life in the frozen tundra that is New England and has a hard time understanding weather stories in California.