

Cramped Shudder

Told his play's been tampered with, he asks, "Great, but does it work?"

One of Sledgehammer Theatre's most haunting images for *Macbeth* comes in Act Three, Scene Five. Hecate sits on a throne high above the raked stage. A pool of limelight flows over the Greek goddess of the underworld (and "dark magic" in Shakespeare's time). Her long, yellowish-gray locks frame angry eyes, since she has just chided the three Witches for not consulting her about Macbeth.

Shakespeare might have found the scene arresting and puzzling, since he didn't write it. Scholars, using computerized lexical research, agree that Hecate's speech was a later addition, most likely by Thomas Middleton, who wrote it to introduce two of his songs. No one's quite sure when this jazzed-up *Macbeth* got produced. But it must have been around 1616, the year the Bard passed away. "One would like to think that Shakespeare was dead and buried," writes Kenneth Muir, "or at least living in retirement, before his play was spoiled."

To each his Bard of Avon. Muir envisions a pristine text, written by an anal playwright shocked at the mere idea of emendation. But given the ephemeral nature of theater — a favorite subject of Shakespeare's — one can envision a different Bard on his deathbed: told his play's been tampered with, he asks, "Great, but does it work?"

Sledgehammer's *Macbeth*, a share-the-guilt

interpretation, does and does not.

Nick Fouch's scenic design does. The blackened stage rises in layers to St. Cecilia's rose window, which has never been put to better use. Smoky, diaphanous curtains shroud and reveal, offering behind-the-scenes looks at Inverness. Bouquets of thick brown shafts — the size William "Braveheart" Wallace used at Stirling Castle Bridge — flank downstage. They could be spears, leafless trees, Macbeth's "barren sceptre," or the boughs of Birnam Wood set to move to Dunsinane.

Mary Larson's leather and Levi's costumes dress Macbeth in fatigues (he drinks beer and smokes a cigar), while others wear jogging outfits, kimonos, and British tweed. In a play teeming with evil and blurred differences, the costumes are oddly specific. They give characters too local a habitation and a name.

As does putting the Weird Sisters, and Hecate's minions, in gauzy white outfits. The look works, at first: who/what are these beings? And why (when they remember) do they blip like cable TV pixels on the blink? Since they frequent most scenes, however, wandering somnolent on and off, they soon become routine, then mundane.

David Lee Cuthbert's lighting, both subtle and blasting, and Jeff Mockus's otherworldly music create an effective, "hurly-burly" atmosphere. The Kirsten Brandt-directed production works

REVIEW

JEFF SMITH



David Tierney in *Macbeth*

Macbeth, by William Shakespeare

Sledgehammer Theatre

Directed by Kirsten Brandt; cast: David Tierney, Janet Hayatshahi, Laura Lee Juliano, Ruff Yenger, Donald McCline, Monique Guffney, Lisel Gorell-Getz, Brianna Kostelney, Jeremiah M. Maestas; scenic design, Nick Fouch; lighting, David Lee Cuthbert; costumes, Mary Larson; sound and original composition, Jeff Mockus

Playing through March 21; Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Sunday at 7:00 p.m. 619-544-1484

Eurydice, by Sarah Dani Ruhl

UCSD Department of Theatre and Dance, Mandell Weiss Forum, University of California, San Diego
Directed by Daniel Fish; cast: Katherine Sigismund, Garrett Neergaard, Corey Brill, Jose Chavarry, Jennifer Chang, Mark Smith, Genevieve Hardison; scenic design, Melpomene Katakalos; costumes, Ivy Chou; lighting, Jason H. Thompson; sound, Chris Luessmann; choreographer/movement director, Peter Pucci

Playing through February 28; Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m. 858-534-4574

Lycium Theatre • Horton Plaza

619-544-1000

Tickets Now On Sale!

Sunday 7 pm

Sunday 2 pm

Free Parking at Horton Plaza

619-544-1000

FRIDAY, FEB. 27 - SUNDAY, FEB. 29

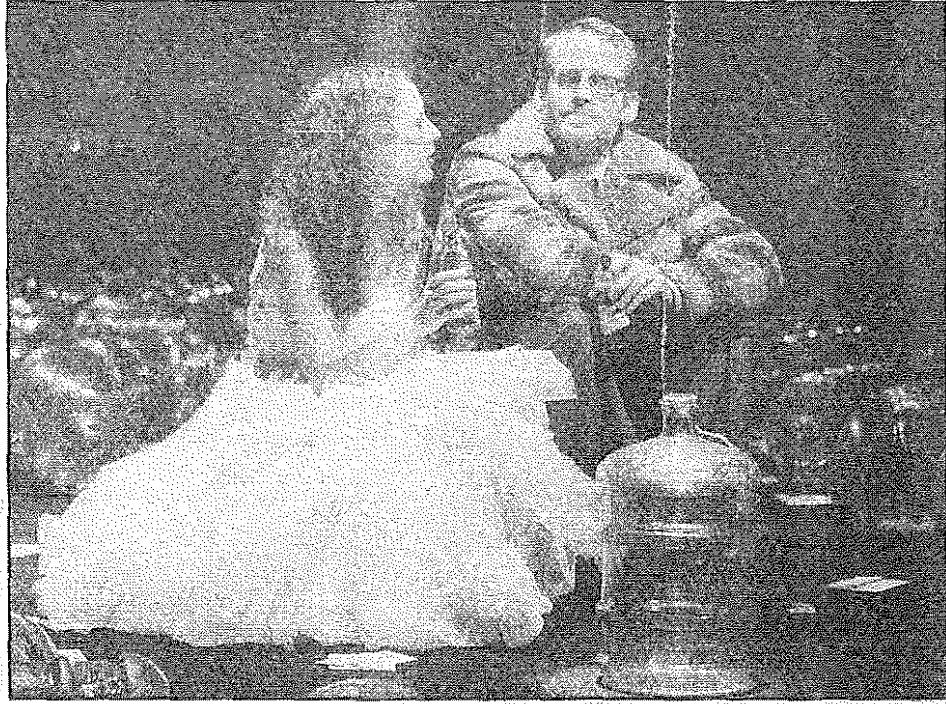
\$10 General, \$8 Students, Srs. Military, Groups \$5+ \$5 Children 12 and under

ANDIEGOREADER.COM
Calendar
THEATER

est when it doesn't try to pin
ne play down. Which is Mac-
eth's curse. Once he slays
Duncan, he must murder again
nd again to maintain his sta-
us quo. It's like throwing a
bble into a pond and trying
o stop the expanding rings.

In a way, Macbeth resem-
bles King Claudius in *Hamlet*.
Both murder to gain the
rown. But while "providence"
nd an infernal purgatory
oom over Claudius, *Macbeth*
akes place in a full moon and
loody universe, beyond ethics
nd morality, where every-
hing, especially desire, opens
nto a bottomless pit.

Macbeth's world is so bleak
t should make confirmed ni-
hilists shudder. Having Hecate
ule over the Sledgehammer
tage cramps that vision. It's
oo facile an explanation for a
ragedy that offers none.
Harold Bloom: "Though
Hecate has some potency in
his nature, one feels a greater
Demiurgical force at loose.
Shakespeare will not name it."
Because Lady Macbeth's so



Eurydice

"fiend-like," *Macbeth's* been la-
beled "anti-women" (even
though "dead butcher" Mac-
beth vies with Richard III as
Shakespeare's most blood-
spattered serial killer). Rather
than take sides, or sweep Lady
Macbeth under a carpet, direc-

tor Kirsten Brandt makes a
smart choice. She intensifies
the dynamics. Brandt has
women playing men,
men/women (in one of the
production's best perfor-
mances, Laura Lee Juliano's
Banquo is female). **In the**

show's biggest eyebrow-raiser,
Brandt has Lady M. kill Mac-
duff's wife and children.

David Tierney and Janet
Hayatshahi, real-life husband
and wife, give the Macbeths
strong sexual chemistry (and
Brandt rightly stresses their

sympiotic natures). Hayatshahi
speechifies on occasion,
though, giving her readings too
formal a balance. Tierney
could improve a competent
performance if he could repli-
cate Macduff's urge to "cut
short all intermission." For
Macbeth, there is no zero-to-
sixty. He's so impatient, so
eager to get things done, there
is only zero, then sixty.

UCSD has staged some of the
most unforgettable theater I've
seen: Robert Woodruff's di-
rection of *Heat*, Anne Bogart's
1951, *The Dispute*, and espe-
cially her majestic *Strindberg*
Sonata, and now Sarah Dart
Ruhl's *Eurydice*, directed by
Daniel Fish. It's the Orpheus
myth, but told by his wife. Eu-
rydice dies and goes to Hades,
where her father wasn't dipped
deep enough in Lethe to-for-
get. She almost escapes, but
Orpheus looks back too soon.

Ruhl writes like Charles
Mee, using inversions and sur-
prises to recast the familiar
story: including a young Lord
of the Underworld, who grows
downward, like a turnip, and
is "ready to be a man now";
and a Chorus of Stones, who
remind Eurydice that "father is

not a word that dead people
understand" (the play is *really*
about fathers and daughters).
Even in the original myth, Or-
pheus reveals symptoms of
controlling narcissism, so Ruhl
doesn't have to push hard to
expose these traits (an artist,
Eurydice learns, is "always go-
ing away from you").

In 70 intermissionless min-
utes, *Eurydice* dazzles, verbally
and visually. But to describe
what happens in detail would
be like revealing the culprit in
a mystery. I'll just say that
UCSD's bold, thought-pro-
voking, wonderful production
includes an astonishing Jeri-
cho-effect — and that if you
love live theater, RUN to this
one. It closes Saturday night. ■

THEATER
LISTINGS

Theater listings and commentary are
by Jeff Smith. Information is
accurate according to material given
us, but it is always wise to phone the
theater for any last-minute changes
and to inquire about ticket
availability. Many theaters offer
discounts to students, senior citizens,
and the military. Ask at the box
office.

"Critic's Choice?"

The Interactive Improv Experience