

# 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, Brianne 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 Choi; 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

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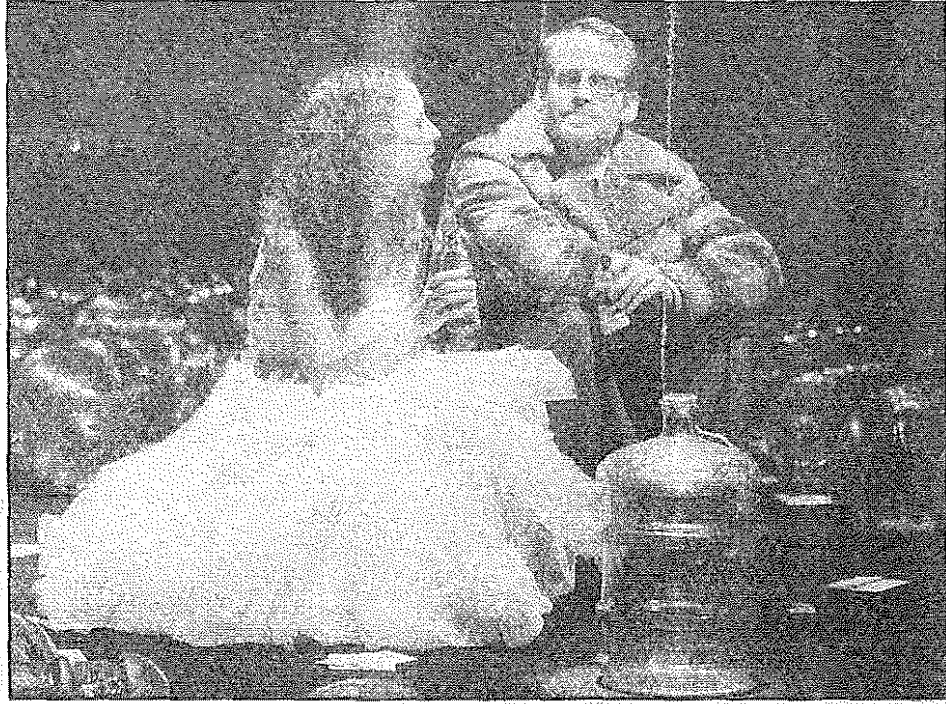
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THEATER

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  
bloody universe, beyond ethics  
nd morality, where every-  
thing, 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  
stage 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.

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