

NSR debuts striking hard-rock 'Macbeth'

[Owen Lane](#) | Friday, November 10, 2017



The Not-So-Royal Shakespeare Company's production of "Macbeth" debuted Friday night in the Lab Theater of Washington Hall. English master's student Michael Vaclav directs the Scottish Play with a modern twist that suits both the theater space and the sprawling story of ambition gone awry.

The cast of the play is predominantly female, with all of the play's Scottish Thanes — including the titular Macbeth — portrayed by actresses. Men play only two major roles: Duncan and Malcolm. This iteration of "Macbeth" demonstrates that the company's gender-blind casting policy can still wring excellent performances from actors performing roles outside their gender. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are particularly mesmerizing performances. Macbeth is played in a way perfectly befitting the plot progression of the play, becoming more frantic and intense as his intentions fall into ruin. Lady Macbeth is played with the fiery ambition required for the role.

"Macbeth" utilizes an adventurous aesthetic that, with a few small exceptions, creates a theatrical environment that primes the audience perfectly for the play's content. Cleverly, the play does not attempt to construct too much context to match the production's aesthetic. However, at rare times the theme feels slightly superfluous, like a flourish on top of an orthodox Shakespeare production. Rather, Vaclav described his interpretation of "Macbeth" as a sort of "Early-Modern horror movie," and his production style is heavily informed by this interpretation. This performance has been transferred from the Early-Modern era into an atmosphere that, although difficult to pin down, seems to resemble the late 20th century. The costumes consist of vaguely militaristic clothing. Flak jackets are donned over hard-rock band T-shirts.

The clearest difference between this production of Macbeth and others is the production's incorporation of music. Not only is music rampant throughout the play, but the music itself is rather unconventional for Shakespeare. Metallica, Guns N' Roses, Queen and Led

Zeppelin songs all play during the performance, mostly at the ends and beginnings of scenes, but occasionally during the play's action. At times, the use of music is jarring and does not mesh with the prior scene's action. At one point, the overly jaunty song "Mr. Brownstone" plays out a sobering scene. Most of the time, though, the hard-rock palette paints a daunting picture in the minds of the audience.

The play begins with the haunting Metallica song "One" echoing in the small theater. This song fills the pitch-black theater with a claustrophobic ambiance that perfectly precedes the arrival of the witches. After Banquo's death, the classic Zeppelin tune "Stairway to Heaven" begins, a cute elbow-nudge to the audience. The hard-rock sound of the late '70s to early '90s not only coincides chronologically with the arrival of the American "slasher" genre; also, crunchy guitars and cacophonous, cymbal-heavy music generally suit a play that thrives on chaos and disorder.

The play is not perfect, but one gets the impression that this is mostly due to a lack of resources. The concept behind the production is very solid and it would be fascinating to see this play on an even larger scale. Not-So-Royal Shakespeare has created a compelling retelling of a play that is already extremely stylish and attractive to audiences.

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