

Review: Dunsinane – A Contemporary Play set in an Historical Context (*****)

☒ Dunsinane, which runs at the Royal Lyceum Theatre until 4th June 2011, is an extremely well produced National Theatre of Scotland contemporary play. In the view of this reviewer it should not be missed!

This play successfully negotiates the stormy waters of writing a sequel to Shakespeare's play, "Macbeth". It opens with a narrative from the Boy Soldier (Tom Gill) who tells us about the journey of the English soldiers going from Kent to Fife to depose the "Tyrant" King lead by Siward (Jonny Phillips). In the ensuing battle the King is killed and for a while it is mistakenly thought that the Queen, Gruach, (Siobhan Redmond) is dead. She turns out to be a thorn in Siward's side for the rest of the play, as all his good intentions rapidly descend into bad as time goes on. Gaelic is frequently spoken and sung during the play, all to great effect. The music played by Alex Lee, Ric Chandler and Sarah Willson is often haunting but adds lightness and very closely compliments the ensuing drama. It is refreshing to hear music of this quality compliment a serious play.

King Malcolm (Brian Ferguson) replaces the "Tyrant" king and his dialogue with Siward produces some very memorable soundbites of dry wit when elucidating how Scots explain things.

"To call me (the king) a liar is unacceptable" and when discussing if the queen was dead he challenges Siward; "Are you going to persist with this liberalness?"

In fact this light comedy continues in various themes throughout the whole play, and lifts it into a new dimension.

So often it is tempting to keep a contemporary Shakespearean play serious, but that can make matters drag on, which is far from the case here.

The story continues with the queen courting Siward to marry her, but secretly she is planning an attack on his men. This attack proceeds, and she escapes with her son, away from the clutches of Siward into the glens of Scotland. Siward then spends many months searching for her, killing many people on the way.

Egham (Alex Mann) reacts to Siward when told some were killed:- " You burned them alive – a bit Scandinavian isn't it?!" A climax to the end which is memorable in its own right then ensues.

A friend who accompanied me to see the play noted that it had many parallels with the modern-day invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. He said a very telling phrase from the wily King Malcolm was:- " You can no more impose peace (in Scotland) than stamp out the waves in an ocean."

Dunsinane will convert many a sceptic theatre-goer to one thirsting for more, and it is good value for money too. An excellent drama!

More information can be found at:

http://www.lyceum.org.uk/webpages/show_info.php?id=1008