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Review

TITUS ANDRONICUS

[Red Phoenix Theatre Inc & Butterly Theatre](#)
[Holden Street Theatres](#)

Until 27 Aug 2016



Review by [Tony Busch](#)

So, Shakespeare invented the soap opera, or so it seems. Whether this early play was just a rehearsal for later greatness or whether it was concocted to satisfy the bloodlust normally fed by bear baiting and cock fighting, we'll never know. What is certain is this "Games of Thrones" meets "The Bold and the Beautiful" is credibly brought to life in this amazing production.

When famous Roman general, Titus Andronicus returns to Rome with the captive queen of the Goths, Tamora, he little dreams that she will become empress to Saturninus, the man he decides will become emperor. The fact that he has sacrificed Tamora's eldest son in the funeral rites for two of his own, doesn't make for a bright future, as Tamora vows revenge on him and his household and now has the power to bring it about.

Michael Eustice has managed to make this flawed script work superbly on a myriad of levels. The simple set of black drama blocks creates every locale the play demands, from a forest glade to the Roman Forum. His direction brings credibility to the broadest swings of emotion, from politically inappropriate comedy (never a problem in Shakespeare's day) to the most visceral drama.

Brant Eustice is fabulous in the title role, performing the equivalent of walking across Niagra on a tightrope. It's a beautifully balanced and intelligent performance.

Anna Bampton almost steals the show as Lavinia, the hapless daughter of Titus, who's treated rather shabbily. She spends the rest of the play unable to talk coherently but still manages to wring every ounce of sympathy and pathos. Brava!

Matt Houston does well as Emperor Saturninus, demonstrating a seriously flawed personality, though a little less petulance and a little more mentally disturbed menace would have made him all the more despicable.

Rachel Burfield shines as Tamara, delivering another intelligent characterisation. Here is someone who, like Brant Eustice, knows how to shape and nuance Shakespeare's lines.

Joshua Coldwell makes a striking Bassianus, brother to Saturninus and the loser in the quest for emperorship. It's a noble performance that again treats the Bard's lines with care. He doubles superbly as a dim-witted yokel, sent to his death by Titus in order to deliver a disguised threat.

There are lovely moments contributed by the rest of the cast to ensure that the pace never wanes. The only issue I have is a common one. Diction, diction, diction. No matter whether the character is high or low born, nothing works if we can't make out what you're saying.

Titus has never been performed in Adelaide, and may never be again. Do yourself a favour and take this singular opportunity to see The Bard and the Beautiful now. It's well worth the effort.

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