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THEATRE – Titus Andronicus – Red Phoenix Theatre – HST – 3.5K

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Titus and the Young Lucius – image by Richard Parkhill.

By Peter Maddern

As one his earliest works, it is not clear in the slaughterfest that is *Titus Andronicus* whether Shakespeare was just playing to the blood lusts of his audiences or also trying out a few ideas as practice for his more nuanced tragedies to come.

Back from the war, the great soldier Titus (Brant Eustice) knocks off one of his captured Goths only to find the kid's mother, Tamora (Rachel Burfield), marries the next emperor, Saturninus (Matt Houston) and sets out to square the ledger with some unspeakable acts against Titus' family, particularly the beautiful Lavinia (Anna Bampton).

Revenge of course is a dish best served cold and when Titus gets his chance the servings are enormous. In this play it seems there are more deaths scored by the knife than there are runs off the bat by Australian batsmen on the spinning decks of Sri Lanka and director Michael Eustice revels in the opportunities they present.

Brant Eustice bears some resemblances to the great Shakespearian actor Kenneth Branagh as to both looks and talent and his slightly unhinged Titus successfully mixes bombast and badness in appropriate quantities. Matt Houston's Saturninus is aptly flawed, nearly pathetic as he gets conned and bluffed by his 'heinous tiger' Tamora, played with ample sorcery by Rachel Burfield. Bampton is delightful as Lavinia and the injuries she suffers and endures for us to witness attract the full count of our pity, while Joshua Mensch's Demetrius is suitably nasty and feral.



Matt Houston as the flawed Emperor – image by Richard Parkhill.

Opinion is often split as to whether or not *Titus Andronicus* is a great play; certainly with 17 in the cast and a less than subtle story line, it is perhaps not a surprise that it has previously never been performed in this town. As the tag line to Michael Eustice's Red Phoenix Theatre's ambitions – to bring never before seen theatre to Adelaide – he has certainly made a splash. The production is bold and confronting even with the use of the most spare staging.

If slaughter is your thing, get off your couches shaped by hours before *Game of Thrones* and take in how it used to be done, live on stage.

Kryztoff Rating 3.5K

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