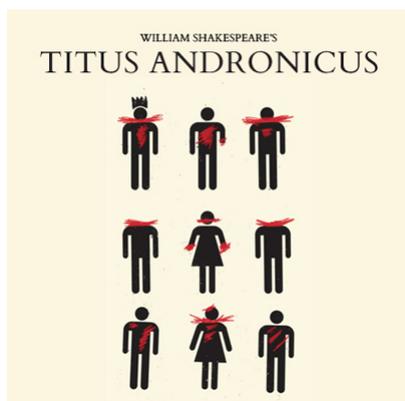




Titus Andronicus

Red Phoenix Theatre. Holden Street Theatres. 20 Aug 2016



Shakespeare invented this thing the world's gone mad for on subscription TV we call *Game of Thrones*. Every single one of his history plays and that grand tragedy *King Lear*, is an exemplar of cut and thrust, blood and guts, gaming for power.

What makes Director Michael Eustice's production of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* worthy of such direct allusion to the biggest thing on the box these last years?

It becomes increasingly obvious in performance, to the experienced ear and eye of a Shakespeare devotee/scholar, that *Titus Andronicus* is a work which dispenses with the deeper exploration of moral psychology for a

much sharper, piercing play on a raw wielding of psychological power as a force of inner terror in gaining power and holding it, with the added gravitas of brutal violence. The text is blood and guts.

Rereading a play has its rewards as in the case of this production. It's enabled a capacity to see ever more the skill with which Director Michael Eustice has discovered and built up on the rounding circles of desire, intimidation and greed between two families, one conquered, one ruling, with a middle playing family as the emblem of righteousness. Family Andronicus, led by its most august warrior, Titus (Brant Eustice.)

Michael Eustice offers a fluid set design of nothing more than portable set blocks in black against the black floor and walls of the space. In marriage with Richard Parkhill's deftly careful lighting and Isabelle Zengerer's exquisitely clean cut and styled costuming, the performance flows with a rich and easy rhythm of emotionally, politically charged gut wrenching drama.

Oh how it rips, as Titus, seeming secure under the sinecure of newly crowned Emperor Saturninus (Matt Houston), happily powers on and his sister Lavinia (Anna Bampton) equally steps forward into a happier life, as their enemies, including Tamora ((Rachel Burfield) are humiliated. That's until Saturninus gets other ideas down the track, and the gaming starts.



Herein lies the beauty of this production. Each thread line of influence, down from the moment Saturninus takes Tamora for himself, is played with exquisite self-serving logic. From Lavinia and her husband all the way down. Except Titus.

It's Shakespearian existentialism, as it might be considered.

So much power in beautiful performances, especially by Brant Eustice as the towering Titus, alongside Bampton's profoundly rich and level Lavinia, Burfield's richly multilayered, cunning Tamora and Houston's deftly comic, yet

louche Saturninus.

See it. Better than a game of thrones.

David O'Brien

When: 18 to 27 August

Where: Holden Street Theatres

Bookings: holdenstreettheatres.com

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