

3FEB2016

# Macbeth: Without Words (Traverse, 2nd Feb '16) – part of the Manipulate visual theatre festival

posted in 4\*, Rated: Outstanding, Theatre, Traverse by Steve Griffin



(<https://edinburgh49dotorg.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/macbeth-manipulate.jpg>)

Sandra Franco photo.

Ludens Ensemble

“A compelling, highly intelligent and creative retelling of the famous story”

Editorial Rating: 4 Stars: Outstanding (<http://edinburgh49.org/about-us/>)

*Macbeth: Without Words* is one of those shows you see from time to time where you can't quite decide if you love or hate it. It's gutsy, original, and a full-on hour long assault of the senses that I couldn't take my eyes off.

The piece starts with one actor, in a corset and clown make-up, leaping around the stage acrobatically before picking up a microphone and making a range of strange noises. Those with a more traditional perspective on Shakespearian theatre might baulk at the

very interpretative style, which I'll admit took some getting used to, but what unfolded was a compelling, highly intelligent and creative retelling of the famous story.

It is a very physical performance, as it needs to be to convey the monstrous action. There is no spoken dialogue. The dexterity of performers was sensational, as the cast of three managed to create almost every character from the play – all identifiable through their physicality and token elements of props and costume. Stand out moments included the initial stabbing of the king silhouetted through a plastic sheet, and Lady Macbeth appearing through that same plastic sheet towards the end, in all her ghostly presence.

Although without speech, it was not without noise; and many of the sounds were created by the performers live – either vocalised into microphones or using various banging, rubbing and scraping of props and instruments. The layering and looping of these created fantastic tension and atmosphere, with a real sense of baleful magic and connection between the performers and the action. Given how powerful this technique was, especially at the beginning where a complex soundscape was created very simply, it was a shame that for some scenes the company relied on pre-recorded sound, leaving me feeling a little bit cheated. At one point a recording of bagpipes was played, and I felt the company – in Edinburgh of all places – missed a trick.

It was also disappointing that for a show pertaining to be “without words”, that short excerpts from the script were occasionally projected onto a screen to clarify the action on stage. I admit that the task to portray every nuance of Shakespeare's work without any words at all is nigh-on impossible, but in some scenes it was done so well – the incantations of the witches, the murders, the washing of the hands, the breaking of the news – all performed using physicality, silhouette and props, that it was such a shame that the company “copped out” in those rare moments. It seemed that with a little bit more work or development the company will have created a piece truly “without words” and fit for any European Capital of Culture.

This could have been one of those mind-blowing, life-changing performances that I'll never forget, but unfortunately, those few flaws held it back somewhat. Still, 'tis far from a sorry sight and overall the battle was far more won than lost.



<http://edinburgh49dotorg.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/outstanding.png>



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Reviewer: Steve Griffin (<http://edinburgh49.org/author/theoriginalstevegriffin/>) (Seen 2 February)

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✦ Clown, Macbeth, physical theatre, Shakespeare

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