

# thatplay

a solo macbeth

## REVIEWS

The New York Times, July 31, 2003

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

### **Enter One Actor, Cloaked in Magic**

By BRUCE WEBER

In the category of theater writ small we have two one-actor shows, "Lilia!" and "That Play," both entries in the Midtown International Theater Festival now unobtrusively going on at the Abingdon Theater Arts Complex on the second floor of 312 West 36th Street in Manhattan.

The black-box space at the Abingdon is about the size of a walk-in closet, with the audience seated on three sides of the floor. The wonderful thing about both these shows, neither of which employs more than a painted black cube or two as a prop, is how much is accomplished with so little. You can tell a good story compellingly with little more than a few square feet of space and a little ingenuity.

"That Play" is a brisk, one-man "Macbeth," adapted by Tom Gualtieri with Heather Hill and performed by Mr. Gualtieri, a slightly built young man with a subtly flexible set of facial expressions and a mischievous, conspiratorial manner. He does all the parts and even mimes

some of the action, including a sword fight or two (though he balks at producing Macbeth's severed head). His witches are entertaining, and his Lady Macbeth is especially creepy.

The sections of the play that have been cut are nicely summarized in offhand asides. ("This being Shakespeare, the fact of Banquo being dead doesn't keep him from showing up on time for dinner.") Mr. Gualtieri's achievement is ...highly entertaining and very effective. He's informative, clear on the rudimentary themes and plot points and great fun...

The final performance of "Lilia!" is today at 4 p.m. "That Play" can be seen tomorrow at 4:20 p.m. and Saturday at 2:50 p.m. The festival itself, which includes a couple dozen other shows on two stages, continues through Sunday.

Midtown International Theatre Festival 2003

**That Play**

80 minutes with no intermission

## Talkin' Broadway, July 31, 2003

By Matthew Murray

If you think there's nothing left to be said about *Macbeth*, think again; Tom Gualtieri is ready to prove you wrong.

In *That Play*, now appearing at the Abingdon Theatre Complex as part of the Midtown International Theatre Festival, Gualtieri not only dissects and discusses Shakespeare's tragic, bloody masterpiece for the audience's benefit, but gives sterling portrayals in most of the play's roles.

With the help of co-adapter and director Heather Hill, Gualtieri succeeds not just at making what many might consider a difficult play understandable, but making one of Shakespeare's darkest plays a great deal of fun. Neither is a small achievement, and that he does it while giving a number of performances which wouldn't be out of place in a full production of the show is merely another feather in his cap.

Take, for example, the agile way he defines each of the three weird sisters, whose prophecies about the title character prove both accurate and disastrous - each has a clearly defined voice, and is always seen relative to one position around the giant cauldron they're tending. Or how, by grabbing the material from the leg of his mock-Elizabethan garb (which has been cagily designed to look as though the lapels and sleeve are covered in blood) he is able to suggest the regal attire of the power-hungry Lady Macbeth and then round it out with a vocal performance that is both understated and sexual, suggesting one of the ways she may exert her will on her husband. *That Play* is full of these sorts of touches.

But Gualtieri also finds a great deal of comedy to add to the presentation. Whether explaining Lady Macbeth's decorating philosophy or her gardening habits, or wryly commenting that, in Scotland, being dead is no excuse for missing a dinner invitation, his humor is lighthearted and irreverent, but always derived from the play itself. He doesn't need to rely on tricks or obfuscation - it's right there on the page, if only you know how to find it.

Gualtieri and Hill do a very good job of locating both that humor and the drama and presenting them in simple ways that put the communication of the play's story first. Gualtieri's frantically defining the stage area into "Macbeth" and "Macduff" sections is funny at first, but pays off dramatically during the story's climactic battle, and his performance of Lady Macbeth's famous mad scene near play's end is openly touching and even human.

Of course, the most interesting question raised by the play is what should Gualtieri do next? *Macbeth*, as one of Shakespeare's shorter tragedies, lends itself more naturally to this type of performance than might others (though his take on *Hamlet* is interesting to contemplate). One thing, however, remains clear: *That Play's* title derives from the long-standing theatrical superstition that uttering the word "Macbeth" in a theater is bad luck. Rest assured, though, there's nothing to fear as long as Gualtieri is around.

**NY Theatre.com, July 31, 2003**

**By Aaron Leichter**

Shunning a set, props, and even supporting actors, Tom Gualtieri presents *That Play*, a speedy retelling of *Macbeth*. His version still has the witches, the general who kills his king to get the crown, the wife who's driven insane, and Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane. He even retains a fair amount of Shakespeare's poetry. But this is definitely Gualtieri's show: an 80-minute animated revision that catches all the twists and many of the characters. But the most important person isn't Macbeth, or even Lady Macbeth, it's a narrator who sketches in bits of Shakespeare's story that aren't acted out. Gualtieri's narrator addresses the audience with convivial assurance. Gualtieri himself is a skillful Shakespearean performer, his voice melodic yet understandable, his young open face conveying the inner lives of his characters.

Gualtieri's talent is especially notable in Lady Macbeth, a character that Gualtieri obviously adores. His performance doesn't mock femininity: he raises his register a few

notches, clasps his pant leg like a train, and poises himself regally. This performance is the highlight of the show, although it never overshadows his other characterizations. Gualtieri is careful to differentiate each role through voice, gesture and attitude, and, helped by director Heather Hill, he also defines a stage space and a tone for the most important parts. Setting Macbeth stage right and Macduff stage left creates a physical sense of opposition that matches the dramatic one.

*That Play* (the title's a reference to the curse that many theatre folk believe haunts *Macbeth*) revels in theatricality. More than a mere reduction of Shakespeare's play, this work stands on Shakespeare's shoulders while using some of his language. If it's occasionally a little self-indulgent, it earns indulgence from the audience too. At eighty minutes, *That Play* is good theatre... a showcase for a young actor with talent.

**The New York Times on WQXR, July 31, 2003**

**By Bruce Weber**

**[transcript]**

...[I saw two] worthy one-person shows over the weekend. The first was "That Play" - a speedy one-man Macbeth adapted and performed by Tom Gualtieri, who manages to suggest dozens of characters merely by altering posture and voice. He's especially good as a creepy Lady Macbeth. And he and his co-adaptor and director, Heather Hill have hit on an effective story-telling formula. The segments of the play ... are linked by synopses of the parts he leaves

out and they're leavened by off-hand wisecracks. It's ... especially entertaining.

It's always astounding to be reminded of how much worthy theatre is out there, invisible most of the time, beneath the glare of Broadway. And the New York International Fringe Festival with more than 200 shows hasn't begun yet. This is Bruce Weber of the New York Times.

## American Theatre Web, July 31, 2003

By Laura Shea

### **Don't Miss That Play**

7/21/2003

#### Midtown International Theatre Festival

"Don't you just love a woman with a plan?" asks Tom Gualtieri, the one man who plays all the parts in *That Play*, a ninety-minute rendition of *Macbeth*. The woman in question is Lady Macbeth, a diva-esque creation, and only one of nineteen characters played by Gualtieri in a cast that includes three very weird sisters, a manly but sensitive Macduff, and a tragic hero who needs more than a little help from his obliging wife. Gualtieri and co-adaptor/director Heather Hill have ... added a wry running commentary that enhances the play without diminishing the tragedy. The Scottish play was never funnier or more serious.

Although the play is still called *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth has a special place in Gualtieri's heart. Whether tugging at his trouser leg as if it were a ball gown, or rereading the letter from Macbeth detailing the witches' prophecies, a

letter that the writer/actor informs us she has read 100 times before, Gualtieri creates a memorable portrait of the "greatest hostess in Scotland." Her "We fail?" spoken in response to Macbeth's growing uncertainty about their enterprise would make the even most recalcitrant husband snap to attention.

Although the lights shift to indicate the change from drama to narrative, within the play Gualtieri must show us the many shifts in character using only vocal intonation and inspired physicality. The small black box theater at the Abingdon Theatre Complex leaves little room for anything else. From warrior king to drunken porter to those wild apparitions who hint at strange doings that "stretch out to th' crack of doom," Gualtieri avoids one downfall of a one-man show—lack of variety—by not limiting the show to just one man. Aided and abetted by the clever commentary and some evocative incidental music by Erin Hill, Gualtieri creates not just a parade of characters but the complete world of the play.

### **British Theatre Guide by Catherine Henry Lamm** **Macbeth 101 - THAT PLAY**

One thing that can be said about most American's: nothing is sacred and everything is fair game...There are productions from both ends of the professional spectrum; from the Public Theatre's Shakespeare in the Park at the Delacourt Theatre in Central Park to the long running "Donkey Show". Some are heart-racingly brilliant...

Performer/Writer, Tom Gualtieri and Director/Writer Heather Hill are the forces behind the one-man THAT PLAY, a primer on MACBETH, playing to sold-out houses at The Midtown International Theatre Festival, this year in the spanking new Abingdon Theatre Complex. Mostly using the better and longer speeches tied together with humorous description and commentary, Tom Gualtieri gives us the one-hour version of what you need to know.

The lean and lithe Mr. Gualtieri takes on almost all of the roles from Lady Macbeth ("don't you love a woman with a plan?") to the porter with success. Keeping the different characters distinct and easily recognizable has to have been his primary task. This he has accomplished flawlessly as when crossing back and forth, "Over here Macbeth! Over here Macduff!" He gives you time, when needed, to catch up. The one thing that truly makes this play stand out is the intricate music and sound by Erin Hill and lighting by Christopher T. Werner. They serve the play totally, flawlessly and without subtlety. "That Play" is the definitive and ultimate "fringe" fare. Very palatable and extremely entertaining.