

Breakdancing Shakespeare Impresses at Hartford Stage with ‘Macbeth’



After two years of virtual productions during the pandemic, Breakdancing Shakespeare at Hartford Stage made a triumphant return this weekend with “Macbeth,” popping, locking, spinning, and sliding.

This is the best production of a Shakespeare play I have seen this year. An exceptionally talented group of actors, ages 14-22 from Connecticut schools and dance crews, filled the stage with heart-pumping choreography and fantastic performances.



Princess-Larrine Moore, Mekyra Frison, Jaya Pichay (Witches) and the cast of *Breakdancing Shakespeare* at Hartford Stage. – Photo by The Defining Studios

From the moment the three witches (Princess-Larrine Moore, Mekyra Frison, and Jaya Pichay) slink onto the stage the audience is entranced. The witches weave their way in and out of almost every scene. They act like puppeteers to a crew of dancer/actors whose zombie-like bodies tell the story of *Macbeth* with devastating dynamism. The witches are amazing dancers.

The storytelling was clear and exciting. A triumph for the director/adaptor, Nina Pinchin, and the choreographer, Brandon Couloute. *Macbeth*, (Jerry Hamilton) begins as an amazed, but confident character. His vaulting ambition is evident. The arc of his character is clear. Wearing a gold hoodie, he raises his arm like an arrow, and you can feel his desire for power, which eventually drives him mad. But he never loses his

swagger.

His wife, Cassandra Colón as Lady Macbeth, exudes wealth and confidence in a body suit that glitters like a rose gold iPhone. Contrary to her husband, whose face she can read like a book, Colón's Lady M is all self-possession and gracious steeliness. But her side-eyes could slay!



Jerry Hamilton (Macbeth) and the cast of Breakdancing Shakespeare at Hartford Stage.

- Photo by The Defining Studios

Macbeth dances with angular anxiety, and Lady M, often in line with the witches, is a subtle and intricate dancer. I absolutely adored the way the lights (design by Ethan Sepa) made shafts of arrows on the floor to lead Macbeth to the murder of Duncan (Aaliyah Norton), a sympathetic and regal portrayal. Then the zombie-like ensemble

being directed by the witches slumped on the floor to become the sleeping guards. The original music by Kevin Scott suits every narrative turn. In particular, “Stars Hide Your Fires,” was ghostly and haunting.

There were so many cool sequences of music, lights, choreography, sound, costume, and acting coming together - too many to mention. The return of Banquo’s Ghost is a masterpiece. Banquo (Glendale Jones) begins the play as quizzical. A doting father, Banquo and his son, Fleance (Ameer Cantrell) ride on hoverboards (nice touch!), and after Banquo is killed, he haunts Macbeth in confrontational breakdance sequences. Jones is an incredibly magnetic, explosive, and controlled dancer. He stalks Macbeth like a lion. He plays with Macbeth as if he were prey. Every muscle in Banquo’s body ripples with unnatural slowness that suggests the supernatural. The audience was riveted by this scene - a tour de force!



Glendale Jones (Banquo) and the cast of Breakdancing Shakespeare at Hartford Stage. -

Photo by The Defining Studios

Both the Porter (Jamare Snype) and Macduff (Shawn Baskerville) rap to move the story along. Snype's knock-knock jokes turn into clever rap. Snype and Baskerville are acrobatic and strong dancers. Jayvian Geronimo is a chill Malcom. At the end of the play, you get the sense that the new leaders will not be tyrannical and unhinged, but calm and inclusive (something we could all hope for in our leadership!).

I left the theatre feeling hopeful and wanting to learn to breakdance. If you were unable to take your kids to this show, **sign them up** for the next round of Breakdancing Shakespeare at Hartford Stage. They will turn out to be great Shakespeare speakers, dancers, and - if it's anything like the camaraderie I saw on the stage - they will make some terrific friends. Congratulations to all involved, including: Ali Austin-Christoper, Nicholas Fortenbach, Ezra Mendes, Ashwin Nair, and Willa Santiago. This ensemble and cast of murderers, servants, lords, was precise and on fire!

Breakdancing Shakespeare is sponsored by the Greater Hartford Arts Council and Hartford Unity.



Emily Bryan

Emily Bryan, Ph.D, is an assistant professor at Sacred Heart University where she teaches courses in literature, writing, religious studies and theater. She holds degrees

from Harvard, Brown, Northwestern, and the University of Birmingham in England, where she was a Fulbright scholar. Her research and publications focus on early modern drama, gender, religious theater and women's writing. Dr. Bryan was a casting assistant for the Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival and has worked as a dramaturg for the Lincoln Center Director's Lab. An active board member of Shakespeare on the Sound in Norwalk, Dr. Bryan is currently leading a collaboration between Sacred Heart University and the Untitled Othello Project. She will be writing about regional theater productions for the Courier.