

ATG CL Presents an Out of Chaos Production, in association with Oxford Playhouse



20 roles played by two award-winning actors · a fast and furious 80 minutes · beautiful poetry, electric drama and playful comedy · skillful physical theatre with powerful text work · accessible, clear and engaging · invites the audience in and makes Shakespeare fresh, relevant and exciting · for everyone aged 11+

Macbeth RESOURCES

About the play:

Something wicked this way comes...

Step into a world where ambition ignites chaos, and destiny spins out of control.

When a trio of mysterious witches plants the seeds of ambition, Macbeth finds himself drawn into a dark spiral of power and betrayal. Guided by his ambitious wife, he embarks on a path of destruction that threatens to unravel both his mind and the kingdom.

In this fresh interpretation, Out of Chaos invites audiences right into the heart of the story. With two award-winning actors playing more than 20 roles, Shakespeare's brutal tragedy is given new life in 80 high-octane minutes.

This accessible, innovative, and exciting production combines physical theatre with powerful text work, vibrant characters and original music. These performances are presented in partnership with ATG Creative Learning. There will be a free 20 minute structured Q&A with the company after the performance for anyone who wishes to stay.

About the Company:

Out of Chaos is a multi award winning theatre company whose work has toured extensively throughout the UK, Europe, the USA and New Zealand.

Their original works include *Out of Chaos*, *Unmythable* and *Norsesome*. Their work centers on retelling old stories to involve and engage audiences in surprising ways.

More about the show from Director Mike Tweddle:

Out of Chaos, in association with Oxford Playhouse, bring a bold new production of Macbeth to the stage, featuring just two award-winning actors who play over twenty roles. The fresh interpretation explores the intersection of fate and free will, inviting audiences to witness the chilling consequences of unchecked ambition. This haunting, breakneck adaptation breathes new life into **Macbeth** told in just 80 high-octane minutes, while retaining the intensity and intrigue of the original cautionary tale.

The production is directed by **Mike Tweddle**, Artistic Director and CEO of Oxford Playhouse, who co-founded **Out of Chaos** seventeen years ago. We spoke with **Mike**, who told us more about what to expect from this fresh take on Shakespeare's tragedy:

What can you tell us about the show?

It's a unique version of Macbeth, with only two actors energetically playing 20 roles! However, I believe it's also a faithful rendition of what is – in my opinion – Shakespeare's most dramatic play.

What can you tell us about the inception and development process of this particular production of Macbeth?

This dynamic production, created by Out of Chaos, began life while I was on attachment at Oxford Playhouse as one of their Evolve artists. 10 years later, I'm delighted to bring it back.

We wanted to find a way to tour a great Shakespeare text to theatres and audiences of all sizes, in a very portable way. Hence there are just two actors, two props and no set in this production! All of the settings and atmospheres that we create are achieved through inventive performance, lighting and sound. In my view, one of the best things about theatre is that it can happen anywhere, and we wanted to create something that embraced this.

What makes this production of Macbeth different from previous versions of Shakespeare's iconic tragedy?

A key desire for us was to really include the audience in the action. This is essential with only two performers on stage, so the actors are constantly talking to the audience and giving them a range of identities throughout the play. This, I hope, invites the audience into a deeper understanding and experience of the story.

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How did you approach the challenge of having just two actors portray multiple of Shakespeare's characters?

The actors work very hard at this sometimes! There is one scene in particular, after King Duncan has been murdered when ten characters all converge on the same scene in a flurry of panic and suspicion. Paul and Hannah, our incredible actors, train for this scene as if they're preparing for a 10k run! Given there is no time for costume changes in this production, we use character names and other verbal signposting, as well as vocal and physical distinctions, to ensure that the audience can follow who's being who at all times!

It looks like this production strays from the typical setting of Macbeth, what can you tell us about the design of the show?

We have worked closely with lighting designer Ashley Bale and Sound Designer/Composer Matt Eaton to create landscapes and environments for each scene, full of atmosphere and energy, using only lighting and sound on an otherwise bare stage. This has enabled us to tour the show internationally and to adapt to an enormous range of performance spaces.

Macbeth has been touring the country and has entertained thousands of young people so far, why is reaching this audience so significant?

Macbeth is a heightened exploration of the dilemmas we all face in our lives, and young people are no exception. Is it right to remain loyal to someone, even if you believe you might create a better world by betraying that loyalty? Should we follow our superstitions or beliefs, even when they lead us down a dangerous path? Should we take the time to think and consider all options, before we make a life-changing decision? Shakespeare explores such questions with great insight and power, and yet his language is inaccessible when you see it on the page. We hope to be able to improve familiarity and confidence towards Shakespeare for young people who see this piece.

What do you hope the audience will take away from this performance of Macbeth?

The brilliance of this play is that you can interpret many messages from it, depending on who you are and what you're working through in your life. So I don't want to second guess its message for anyone! However, I hope that audiences will take away a sense of excitement about the potential of Shakespeare's language, and of theatre as an art form, to thrill and shed new light.

A teacher's perspective:

An original and accessible performance that has many elements to assist young people in understanding and appreciating the play.

The **2-hander cast** is impressive. The use of 'Enter XXX', and the shifts in body language and accents specific for each character, takes a few scenes to get used to, but this is the same when watching *any* Shakespeare as you adjust to the language. Each character has a clear motif, and the shifts are impressive to watch. This was particularly effective in the discovery of Duncan's murder - the language conveys the sense of panic and having the quick shifts in character as well as actors running across the stage to their next character's position helps to convey this hectic moment.

The **inclusion of the audience** is engaging but also supports students in understanding the dramatic and historical context of the play. The effective utilising of the audience as a crowd (for Duncan's speech, as guests at the banquet etc.), as well as making audience members minor characters complete with lines to read, helps to convey how interactive Shakespeare plays originally were - a particular challenge in proscenium arch theatres.

The **Lighting and FX** supports students in exploring the stagecraft of the play as well as the language because it draws out the *necessity* of the lighting and effects in the storytelling.

A stand-out moment that highlights the effectiveness of both of the above points is **Lady Macduff's murder**. The silhouette of 'a murderer' walking towards the spotlight audience member (as Lady Macduff) to sudden black-out is a fantastic 'cinematic gasp'.

Even if students are not keen on this version of Macbeth, the performance will generate discussion in the classroom; it gets them to really interrogate dramatic devices and stagecraft as well as content and characterisation: this is effective grounding when it then comes to analysing the play in assessment.

Kath, GCSE English teacher

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Preparing for the performance:

This **10-minute video Q&A** featuring **Hannah Barrie** and **Paul O'Mahony** (performers in Macbeth), provides valuable insight into the production and is useful for students to view before coming to the theatre.

The video touches on the key themes of the play, as well as the thoughtful decision-making process behind this fast-paced two-person adaptation including:

- Pace and speed of the play
- Power and ambition
- Guilt
- Supernatural / Witchcraft
- Free will or predestination
- The Great Chain of Being
- Tragic heroes
- Style and how theatrical ideas are presented on stage
- Dramatic devices
- Physical skills for interpreting characters
- Lighting and sound design
- Analysing and evaluating a piece of theatre

Access the Q&A Video [HERE](#)

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Review

Macbeth review - something wicked this way whizzes as dynamic duo play all the roles

★★★★☆

Oxford Playhouse

There is one 24-carat scene after another as a cast of two switch from bloodthirsty to comedic without toil or trouble



Andrew Pulver

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Tremendous ... Hannah Barrie and Paul O'Mahony in Out of Chaos's Macbeth at Oxford Playhouse. Photograph: Alex Brenner

A

significant scattering of teenagers attend this show by Out of Chaos, not just because the play is a GCSE staple but also because the touring production trails a reputation for stripping the story to its bare essentials. Staged by Oxford Playhouse's artistic director Mike Tweddle, this Macbeth was developed with students in mind. Two actors take all the roles in a show that is focused to the point of almost miraculous brevity, coming in at just over 80 minutes.

The actors in question are Hannah Barrie and Paul O'Mahony (artistic director of the Hove-based Out of Chaos) and yes, they are the only people we see on stage, though they do seek infrequent and low-intensity bits of audience interaction.

Straightforwardly blunt devices are used to carve a path through the play's comings and goings: the actors announce the entrance and exit of every character, and resort to some intricate hopping from one stage mark to another when a bit of back-and-forth dialogue is required. With the stage bare other than a lit back wall (with prominent captioning), some bravura lighting from Ashley Bale, much of it impressively atmospheric, and neat creepy-movie style sound dubs from Matt Eaton, the show makes a little go a very long way.



Effortless ... Hannah Barrie and Paul O'Mahony in Out of Chaos' Macbeth at Oxford Playhouse. Photograph: Alex Brenner

O'Mahony (who plays Macbeth) and Barrie (Lady Macbeth) master the mercilessly pruned playtext. Both are tremendous, as they negotiate the contours of overweening ambition, bloodthirsty carnage and paranoid, nightwalking guilt. Amazingly, both manage to switch effortlessly into the lighter bits, with Barrie doing an amusing drunk porter and O'Mahony a nicely snivelling Ross.

Clarity and narrative are the main drivers. With everything so compressed there are inevitable sacrifices: gloomy gothic grandeur is largely absent (apart from the dry ice that envelops the auditorium at the start) and more expansive shows would no doubt give more in terms of spectacle. There's no moving forest or spurting gore. Likewise, the weird sisters are pared down to briefly heard disembodied voices (seemingly pre-recorded) that float out of the murk. Some scenes whiz by - you only just register Banquo's ghost before it's on to the next one - but with every ounce of fat trimmed you get one 24-carat scene after another in a seemingly endless profusion. It's like eating the richest steak possible.

Macbeth will tour in 2026

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Audience and Venue Feedback :

“Young people studying Macbeth have a lot of options when it comes to that piece of work as it has been interpreted so many ways, but they rarely experience it as a live theatre performance. I think the choice to have the two actors performing as a pair kept the pace of quite a long play punchy and steady. That along with the unique use of lighting to complement the style, creating a greater difference between scenes and characters, and the hilarious audience participation, made the show such a unique and interesting take on Macbeth. I thoroughly enjoyed watching the show and know for sure that I would have loved it just as much a few years ago when I was doing my GCSE’s.” Milton Keynes Theatre

‘The production itself was superb. Two people acting out all the characters was amazing!’ Audience member Liverpool Empire

‘ The atmosphere in the venue was amazing and provided such a unique opportunity to see the production at an accessible ticket price. With the show being adapted to really suit the school’s audience, I don't think there's anyone else who could offer that experience at that price point.’ Sunderland Empire

‘Wow! What a performance! We had a fantastic day, and I am incredibly proud of all the children for engaging with the play and the challenging language and material. On the bus back, they had so many questions which shows they were really working hard to listen and think about it. It was wonderful to hear the children commenting that it was great how they didn't understand the language but understood what was going on at the same time. ‘ Primary School teacher Brighton

‘My Primary School attended your wonderful performance of Macbeth at the Kings Theatre; for 11 year old children from the east end of Glasgow to take on Shakespeare is truly remarkable. Thank you for changing their perception of theatre and the arts.’ Teacher Glasgow

Press:



"one 24-carat scene after another" - [The Guardian](#)



"I left the theatre knowing that I had seen something very special." - [The Latest](#)



"Action-packed, slimline success" - [Reviews Hub](#)

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The Curse of the Scottish Play

The Scottish Play. The Bard's Play. Macbeth is surrounded by superstition and fear of the 'curse' – uttering the play's name aloud in a theatre causes bad luck. But where did this superstition come from?

Macbeth, Act 4 Scene 1

'Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble...'

Sixteenth century Scotland was notorious for its witch-hunts, mainly due to King James VI of Scotland's obsession with witchcraft. The violent death of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots by execution in 1587 was said to have inspired James' dark fascination with magic.

Later, in 1589 when James was sailing back to Scotland from Denmark with his new wife, Anne, their ship encountered violent storms at sea, and they were nearly drowned. The Scottish King blamed the evil spells of witches for conjuring the storm, and following his return to Scotland ordered a witch-hunt in the coastal town of North Berwick. He later wrote *Daemonologie*, a treatise on witchcraft to further inspire persecution against witches.

Witchcraft to please the king

James became King James I of England in 1603, and his new subjects were keen to appease him and his views on the demonic. Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* was published in 1604, and its shocking portrayal of witchcraft and association with the devil intensified England's fear of sorcery.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* followed in 1606 with direct references to James' earlier misfortune at sea: '*Though his bark cannot be lost, Yet is shall be tempest-tost*'. Shakespeare was also said to have researched the weird sisters in depth; their chants in *Macbeth*, and ingredients of fenny snake, eye of newt and toe of frog, are supposedly real spells.

Accidents, injuries and deaths - the curse of Macbeth

According to folklore, *Macbeth* was cursed from the beginning. A coven of witches objected to Shakespeare using real incantations, so they put a curse on the play.

Legend has it the play's first performance (around 1606) was riddled with disaster. The actor playing Lady Macbeth died suddenly, so Shakespeare himself had to take on the part. Other rumoured mishaps include real daggers being used in place of stage props for the murder of King Duncan (resulting in the actor's death).

The play hasn't had much luck since. The famous Astor Place Riot in New York in 1849, caused by rivalry between American

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actor Edwin Forrest and English actor William Charles Macready, resulted in at least 20 deaths and over 100 injuries. Both Forrest and Macready were playing Macbeth in opposing productions at the time.

Other productions have been plagued with accidents, including actors falling off the stage, mysterious deaths, and even narrow misses by falling stage weights, as happened to Laurence Olivier at the Old Vic in 1937.

The cause of the curse

Macbeth was also seen as unlucky by theatre companies as it usually meant that the theatre was in financial trouble. *Macbeth* was (and still is) a popular play that was guaranteed an income so if it was suddenly announced it could mean that the theatre was struggling. Equally, the high production costs to stage the play could also bankrupt a theatre - referenced in Martin Harrison's 1998 book, *The Language of Theatre*.

Breaking the curse

So how can you avoid catastrophe if you utter the play that shall not be named? Exit the theatre, spin around three times, spit, curse and then knock on the theatre door to be allowed back in...

Thanks to www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/about-the-play/the-scottish-play for this information

More useful resources :

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/articles/zdt42sg>

<https://www.shakespeareschools.org/pages/what-you-will-macbeth>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/27nd7LWzBhrbfpjbqH6WIMK/king-george-iv-attracts-star-shakespearean-actors> Macbeth in Brighton