

Macbeth School Trip



'Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
Hover through the fog and filthy air.'
(Macbeth Act 1, Scene 1)



The air was 'filthy' too with dry ice being pumped across the stage to establish the mood, as the witches or weird children floated down from the ceiling to gather upon the heath and make their predictions. Every detail of this opening scene urged our imaginations to sense confusion of the usual human order, a reversal of human values, a sinister challenge to ordinary goodness.

The school children were immediately spell bound; they sat in silence throughout the two hours and fifty minute performance (with a short interval), leaning forward in their seats, transfixed by the action, engrossed by the language of Shakespeare, as it leapt from the text book (studied at School) to the stage.

There was no preparing them though for the full impact of the character of Lady Macbeth. She appeared as a ruthless, totally committed woman striving to make her husband a great King. The children watched as the action unfolded before their eyes with Lady Macbeth pushing Macbeth to achieve her ambitions for him.

Some editors of Macbeth have in the past doubted the genuineness of certain scenes, in particular the Porter Scene in Act II. However, in performance, the humour of this scene was greatly appreciated by our children, as the Porter strutted around the stage, setting off fireworks, whilst trying to cover up the discovery of the murder of the King.

There were some disappointments; the children were disappointed that the witches didn't have a cauldron coming up onto the stage from 'hell' below stage, and that there was no floating dagger on the stage in Act II Scene 1, when Macbeth conjures out of the air a dagger which he cannot grasp. The fact that the children had an expectation of the way they anticipated the production to be performed though is a true indication of their knowledge of the text gained throughout the year. These small disappointments were lost in comparison to the throne that Macbeth sat on, that floated down from above, the ladder that extended from below and took Macbeth up above the stage, as if standing on the parapet of the castle and the water that poured down from above, when Macbeth was crowned King.

The action of the battle, at the end of the play, involved characters moving on and off the stage, with Macbeth clinging to the prophecy that he cannot be harmed. As the realization dawned on Macbeth that he can be killed, he fought to the death rather than be humiliated in front of his kingdom. As Macbeth is slain and falls to the floor with the restoration of order to Scotland, the audience was silent, including our children, still spellbound by the magic of the theatre, to the bitter end....

I think Conner's words as we got onto the bus for the journey home echoed everyone's thoughts; "I wish I could watch it all over again!"