

thatplay

a solo macbeth

REVIEWS

The New York Times

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.



Talkin' Broadway 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.

Gay City News
“Of Errant Nymphs and Bloody Kings”
by Christopher Byrne

Shakespeare is often victimized by gimmickry. The crimes done to The Bard over the years have been legion, so the prospect of enduring 90 minutes of one actor playing all the parts in “Macbeth” raised red flags. Happily, in the first five minutes of “That Play: A Solo Macbeth,” I was waving a white flag and surrendered to the artistry, charm, and humor of Tom Gualtieri who, along with Heather Hill, has cut Shakespeare’s shortest play down to its greatest moments and interspersed them with commentary and audience interaction.

It is an insightful and moving commentary on political power, intrigue, and ambition. These

themes are in the original, but Gualtieri’s asides and interplay with the audience give them a contemporary feel. Gualtieri is masterful playing each part with clarity and specificity. He manages the range of outsized emotions that characterize Shakespeare’s bloody play, but remains endearing and charming as himself. All of this might seem a bit precious if Gualtieri wasn’t so convincing. His intensity is mesmerizing and his understanding of the language is impressive. The result is more exciting and engaging than many full productions of “That Play” I’ve endured. This is an absolute delight..

ELJNYC.com/Off-Broadway
by Laurie Lawson

Tom Gualtieri is a force (and the only force) to be reckoned with in *THAT PLAY: A Solo Macbeth*. He and co-writer/director Heather Hill have taken Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and turned it on its classic ear, poking holes with witty asides, interactive exercises, and modern drollery. In a mere 90 minutes, the story of the doomed King of Scotland unfolds, complete with battles, witches, ghosts, and a slew of noblemen/women and servants. And the

common thread is the genius of Gualtieri who magnificently portrays every one of them! Man, woman, child, living or dead, he is dauntless in his enactment of The Bard’s tragedy. ‘Tis a sight to behold.

Part of The Left Out Festival 2012, a celebration of LGBT theatre, all net proceeds will be donated to Bailey House.

The New York Times on WQXR
[transcript]
Bruce Weber

...[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 wise-cracks. 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.

Times Square Chronicle by JK Clarke

It is a rare feat to take such an oft performed and beloved Shakespeare play as Macbeth and put a new and unique twist on it. But that is exactly what Tom Gualtieri and Heather Hill have done with That Play: A Solo Macbeth. [Okay, maybe not so unique now that Alan Cumming is opening his own version on Broadway; Gualtieri has been performing the piece on various stages since 2003, yet the Cumming production makes no mention of it in their notes or interviews . . . hmm, hurlyburly indeed.]

Because the title and press kit gives it away, the production's "solo" component has already been absorbed by the time one arrives at the theater. It's hard to imagine how stunned an audience might be upon sitting for the performance and realizing there's just one man — Tom Gualtieri in this case — in the role of all 19 characters. That he pulls it off astonishingly well is just icing on the cake.

Clocking in at a very comfortable 80 minutes, it's obvious that we're not seeing the entirety of the text, and that's just fine. Gualtieri interrupts himself periodically with commentary about both the play and his performance of it. His asides are poignant and amusing — he's watching the play along with us. In essence, his 20th role is that of an audience member.

Most of Gualtieri's roles are delightfully nuanced. For the night Porter of the famous "Knock, knock!" scene, he transforms into a craggy, crippled with age, high pitched and sometimes shockingly profane curmudgeon; his Weird Sisters are all distinct personalities and voices, and, mercifully, not all "witchy" sounding. His preferred role, he tells us, is Lady Macbeth, and he captures her magnificently, lifting his loose pant leg for a splash of femininity and long dress effect. His Lady M is scheming, devious, and her eyes flash with delight at her husband's ill-gotten achievements; when she comes unravelled, she seems shocked by her own sense of guilt. The "Out damned spot" scene, often mis-played, is haunting and unsettling here. She is a complex and layered Lady M — as she should be — and Gualtieri is in her head more than any other character.

The performance feels less like a play than storytelling. Gualtieri is at times a dramaturg, explaining nuances of the piece: sometimes discussing setting, historical context or even his own feelings about the play. So we end up not just witnessing, but learning about the play.

It turns out that there is one prophecy from the Weird Sisters that didn't make it into the play: When one man doth become 19, shall Macbeth be triumphant.

NY Theatre.com
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.

American Theatre Web
"Don't Miss *That Play*"
by Laura Shea

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.

nytheatre.com
by Di Jayawickrema

There are two things you don't do inside a theater: wish somebody "good luck" before a show, and say the word "Macbeth." It is one of theater's longstanding superstitions that uttering "Macbeth" out of character will bring on sure disaster. Instead, actors refer to it as "The Scottish Play," "The Bard's Play," or simply, as actor/writer Tom Gualtieri does, "*That Play*." As either the world's most entertaining recap of Macbeth for someone who has never seen it, or a small master class in acting for those who love theater, *That Play* is a triumph. Between embodying 19 characters, Gualtieri offers swift summaries, wry asides, and asks for audience participation--but not too much of it, never fear--the stage belongs to him. Considering the show returns to Stage Left Studio now in its fifth extension, it seems Gualtieri can even say "Macbeth" without any fatal consequences.

For the 80-minute run of *That Play*, co-written with director Heather Hill, the only occupants of the small stage is the actor and one black box. Its bareness is a testament to the play's well-repaid faith in its performer. Gualtieri employs true theatrical sleight-of-hand, marking his quicksilver metamorphoses by characteristic physical cues--Lady Macbeth impatiently sweeping a leg behind her as she goads Macbeth to his bloody bid for the throne, Macbeth, uselessly trying to hold her off with a forbearing arm held aloft, Macduff, arms akimbo, righteously defending the realm.

It's a dizzying pleasure to watch Gualtieri dart in and out of the play. He abruptly cuts off Macbeth's blustering soliloquy after the murder of King Duncan with "He's talking way too much"--and promptly faints away as Lady Macbeth to distract the other characters. Also impressive is his emotional elasticity; the way he can breathe humor into the accents of the drunken porter and heartbreak into the cries of a bereaved Macduff with equal aplomb. And he doesn't just move between characters, he moves with them; changing his posture as Macbeth descends into madness, a slight bend in his back signaling the twist of Macbeth's soul, a terrible glint in his bloodshot eye.

Shakespeare's text has been dissected and analyzed to the bone, but one obvious thing that came forcefully home to me again as Gualtieri, mesmerizing as all three weird sisters, adds "the finger of a birth-strangled babe" to the witches' brew, is just how delectable his language is. It takes a skillful actor savoring each of the Bard's words before you to remind you that in his day, while theater had the power to thrill and to move, it was foremost supposed to be a really good time. When Tom Gualtieri first springs onto the stage, he opens: "Okay, I've got one." This man is here to entertain.

Aisle Say
"They Should Have (Even) Brighter Futures"
by David Spencer

...Next is Tom Gualtieri's *That Play: A Solo Macbeth*. The versatile actor and co-adaptor (with director Heather Hill) has turned the tragedy of the political schemer, the wife who runs him and the witches and ghosts who haunt him into a fairly sprightly affair, replete with pauses for wry commentary and a little audience participation--well, cooperation at any rate. The discursive chattiness put me in mind, of all things, of Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare (the only book anyone ever needs for a quick-dose guide to understanding everything that comes up in clear, concise, conversational prose).

The piece has a limited performance schedule, but it keeps getting extended and of this writing has a few weeks left. An even longer life in New York would be nice, but this also strikes me as a little tour de force that would do well in the UK (presented, say, by an institutional theatre with numerous playing spaces, including an amenable small one, like, say, the National; or prominently featured in a Fringe festival or venue)...and that might also have a life beyond Mr. Gualtieri's own performance. Something to consider, anyway. And market accordingly...?

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

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.