

With little toil and trouble, staging bubbles.

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Byline: Michael Grossberg

Feb. 17--Macbeth is, in Shakespeare's words, "a tale full of sound and fury." At Thursday's world premiere of Radio Macbeth in the Wexner Center for the Arts performance space, Anne Bogart's SITI Company captured that sound and fury better than many traditional productions of the Bard's bloody drama. Because the blood isn't shown, that's even more impressive. Part of the brilliance of the radio-style approach comes from the way in which the company enlists the audience's imagination to help tell the tale. Set in the 1940s in an abandoned theater -- with tables, chairs and microphones set up for a radio rehearsal -- Radio Macbeth transcends its bravura roots in Orson Welles' radio broadcast (and 1948 film) of Macbeth to fulfill its potential as another signature SITI piece with timeless appeal. Yet the concept takes time to jell, and Bogart's biggest fans will need to adjust their expectations because the company breaks new ground. While most SITI pieces are memorable for their sculptural movements and surreal imagery, Radio Macbeth minimizes such movements to maximize the effect of the sounds.

More sound-driven than any of the dozen other Bogart performance pieces I've seen, yet as compelling as her more movement-driven works, Radio Macbeth benefits tremendously from Darron West's textured sonic design. West blends the resonant human voice -- individually and in a ghostly chorus -- with mournful instrumental music and simple sound effects such as footsteps, heavy breathing into a microphone and the synchronized shutting of a half-dozen folding chairs. Most evocative throughout, though, is the sound of welltrained actors giving powerful voice to Shakespeare's words. As in any Shakespearean production, traditional or experimental, that's just as it should be. Seven talented SITI actors play multiple roles, giving the production a kaleidoscopic spin as well as a propulsive power. Stephen Webber is masterly in the title role, weaving shades of Welles into a performance full of passion, pride and terrible tragedy. Ellen Lauren's Lady Macbeth is powerful yet vulnerable, especially in her later scenes of tormented memory. At times, Lauren seems to be doing the Lady by way of a 1940s-era Agnes Moorehead. But mostly she gets to the emotional core of the pivotal role without period mannerisms. Will Bond projects a wiry intensity as Duncan and Macduff. Barney O'Hanlon's boyish innocence brings to life Malcolm, Banquo and other roles. Kelly Maurer, Akiko Aizawa and Gian-Murray Gianino demonstrate versatility and crisp style in multiple roles. Lighting designer Brian Scott brilliantly alternates light and darkness. Some of the most primal scenes occur when the attention is focused on a flickering and moving dot of light. West and Bogart co-direct the 90-minute one-act

with compelling minimalism, adroitly condensing an already-tight drama into an operatic ghost story. Macbeth ranks as one of the greatest ghost stories because its central characters are haunted by their actions. Bogart's company sheds new light -- and reveals new levels of darkness -- on a classic about the price of power-lust. The SITI Company's sixth world premiere at the Wexner Center captures the spirit of -- and the spirits in -- Macbeth. mgrossberg@dispatch.com

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