Written by Jill Walsh
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In this weather, I pity the actors in Genesius Guild's production of *Macbeth*. In addition to the fact they're on stage wearing three layers of clothing and toting swords, shows are performed at Rock Island's Lincoln Park outdoor theatre, which draws little breeze, lots of bugs, and, of course, heat. Though these aren't ideal conditions for actors, or for audience members, people willing to brave the heat for three hours and put on the bug spray will be more than pleased to see an incredibly well-done yet traditional version of one of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

Macbeth, as Genesius Guild producer Don Wooten lengthily explains before each performance, is one of Shakespeare's "big four," included with his other "greats" *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*. Each of the four tragedies explores human nature, inner desires, and, most importantly, the downfall of a character who reaches beyond his limits.

Macbeth is one of the darkest of Shakespeare's works. Set in Scotland, the play evolves around the elements of fate, the crumbling of friendships, and the destruction of a marriage, stemming from a struggle for power.

The title character is played by Matthew Walsh, who has frequented the Guild stage in the past few years, most recently as Hamlet in 2001. Although I have some bias – he also happens to play the leading man in my love life – Walsh is able to flesh out this complex character into a strong and emotional human being.

Walsh is at his best when he's on stage alone (especially in the "dagger" scene and the "poor player" monologue) – not because he works poorly with other actors, but because in these moments, he has complete control of the audience. Overall, Walsh is intense and powerful – an ominous presence on stage. Though he and Lady Macbeth are overly affectionate and a bit awkward – they lead each other around by the hand like children, rather than husband and wife – they were well-chosen by director Jeff Coussens.

Young Ann Sonneville is Lady Macbeth, a purely evil character whose own longing for power drives her to madness. Sultry Sonneville effectively convinces us to dislike her character, as she seduces her husband into deeds – such as killing the king – that will help her rise to power.

Though both lead characters are powerful, the crowd-pleasers are the three tricky witches, who control the stage with conviction, humor, creepy laughter, decaying teeth, and warts. Patti Flaherty, Peggy Hanske, and Susan Perrin-Sallak make up the trio of eerily engaging and humorous witches, who have the ability to reveal the future through spirit mediums and cauldron spells. Their groans, snorts, and facial expressions are addictively funny, and a relief from the heaviness of the murders, deaths, and deceptions in the play.

Other noteworthy performers are J.C. Luxton, as the vengeful Macduff, and Pat Flaherty, as the spirited Banquo. Both balance the story as gentle, truth-seeking individuals who are

unfortunately drawn into Macbeth's downfall and power plays. Also, murderer Steve Strupp is chillingly good, especially in the "let it come down" scene. His part is brief, but it's important because it advances the plot.

Out of a cast of 36, 29 roles are held by men. The lack of male acting talent was obvious in a few of the lesser roles; some of the actors seem to have misplaced their ability to speak clearly. Because vocal projection is such an important element in theatre, and especially on an outdoor stage, it's painfully apparent when it's lacking.

On the whole, opening night went fairly smoothly, with only a few technical challenges – such as a prop that caused almost every actor to trip (though gracefully) over it. With the exception of some brief lighting adjustments during the show, everything was visually pleasant, from the simple forest backdrop to the detailed castle stairway. Costuming was beautiful, from Macbeth's gold shoes to the colorful capes worn by the guards and the kings.

Don't expect too many surprises from this Shakespeare classic, but come prepared for a powerful (and free) performance in the lovely setting of Lincoln Park.

Macbeth *will be performed August 3 and 4 at the Lincoln Park stage in Rock Island at 8 p.m. Shows are free.*