
SHAKESPEARE'S VILLAINS

Andrew McKinnon Presentations in association with the State Theatre Company SA

Adelaide Festival Theatre
Until February 15

Review by Fran Edwards

Dressed all in black on a bare stage Steven Berkoff wove theatrical magic in his one-man production "Shakespeare's Villains". Exploring the Bard's villains he categorises them from the psychotic to the mediocre. He describes Iago as mediocre. His Iago is anything but mediocre. With no props and only his voice and body he recreates snippets from many works, always avoiding the obvious, making the audience rethink the definition of villain.

Berkoff's face is familiar from his film work, "A Clockwork Orange", "Octopussy", "Beverly Hills Cop" to mention a few and he is very familiar with the workings of villainy, not just those of Elizabethan times. Apart from performing Shakespeare, Berkoff has many directorial credits with the Bard's work and all this experience enhances his understanding and interpretation of the many characters he brings to visit. Both a consummate mime and mimic, Berkoff is sure of himself and his talent.

A strange mixture of performance and lecture, this production is fascinating. The highlights include some of the most well known pieces, in particular the interchange between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (Berkoff delivers both characters) demonstrating vocally and physically the breadth of his talent. His Iago is nasty, his Shylock pitiless and his Richard III intelligent. He switches to Richard III with his back to the audience and the change is remarkable. He likens Coriolanus to President Clinton, they both faced the Senate but one kept his honour the other his life! He uses irony like a rapier to expose aspects of characters that we had not previously considered.

He failed to convince me of Hamlet as a villain and he himself questions the one villainous act (killing Polonius) as out of character. However Oberon gains new depth when looked at as a drug lord with pushers (Puck). The complex and difficult nature of the characters are belied by the ease with which he dons their persona.

In this production Berkoff, the enigma, shares with the audience. He shares his love and understanding of Shakespeare. He shares his dislike of critics and his insecurities. He shares his humour in wry and ironic asides. I thoroughly enjoyed sharing an evening with Steven Berkoff.