

THE DAVIS enterprise

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Shakespeare Ensemble puts new twist on Bard's standard

By [Bev Sykes](#)

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Check it out

What: "Macbeth: The Radio Play"

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday

Where: UC Davis Arboretum Gazebo

Tickets: \$15 adults, \$12 students/seniors, \$10 children 12 and under

Info: Call 530-802-0998

It has been said that radio is the "theater of the mind," and when a radio production is also a theatrical production, the audience gets double its money's worth.

Davis audiences are getting a bargain this month as the Davis Shakespeare Ensemble presents "Macbeth: the Radio Play" at the UC Davis Arboretum Gazebo.

Book stands with microphones are set in a circle around the gazebo, and the seven actors sit at each of the posts that hold up the roof. When it's their time to perform, they step to the mic and read from their scripts.

Directors Gia Battista and Rob Salas, who confesses they want the audience members to have more room for their own imaginations, invite the audience to get into the whole radio experience.

"Even though you can see the actors speaking and can watch some of the sounds being created, we hope that at some point you will 'watch' the show using only your ears and your minds. Yes, that means you can close your eyes ..."

Crucial to the ambience and the success of this play are Battista, the sound designer, and Adam Smith, who creates live sound effects with a dazzling array of tubes, pipes, water, musical instruments and anything that can represent a specific sound.

Richard Chowenhill is the ensemble's resident composer and is responsible for the music that becomes white noise under most of the production. I personally found it distracting, though my husband liked it.

With the exception of newcomer Evan Leiser in the title role, the rest of the seven-member cast each play several roles. (It also appears that though most of the cast have a Shakespearean or other acting background, all seem to be making their Davis Shakespeare Ensemble debut.)

Susanna Risser's primary role is as Lady Macbeth, an understated performance that makes it all the more chilling for its detachment and cold-blooded ability to speak so dispassionately of the murder of King Duncan. She inhabits her characters so well that when she steps to the mic as a crazed witch, or the servant Seyton, you can almost forget that she was also Lady Macbeth.

Leiser is an amazingly strong Macbeth, less the foil of his wife and more the ambitious nobleman whose evil begins to destroy him. Leiser's performance is excellent, but he has one serious flaw that I fear was a tremendous distraction. The man is a spitter. Everything he said was accompanied by sprays or droplets flying out into the air or onto the microphone, and drool running down his lips onto his chin. This was accentuated by the lighting which, from where I sat, showed me his profile brightly lit against the black background of the gazebo.

I fear that I reached a point where I simply could not look at him any more, though I was loving his performance, but was vaguely ill when the next person had to use his saliva-covered microphone.

Sarah Cohen played Banquo, Lady Macduff, General Siward and others. She gave the usual strong performance we have come to expect from her, after seeing several of her one-woman Shakespeare performances. Cohen has a unisex presence that is believable whether she is a male soldier or the grieving Lady Macduff, attempting to protect her children.

Paul DelBene started the show as the good King Duncan and went on to use his considerable acting talents as the drunken porter, the blustery doctor and others. DelBene is a great addition to the Davis Shakespeare Ensemble.

Jason Oler is a loyal friend in Macduff, surprised by the betrayal of his friend, and a menacing killer as well as other characters.

Camille Beaumont and Aileen Wen join with Risser as the witches, their dialog sometimes difficult to understand due to the excessive reverb, but their cackles were clear and unmistakable. When Wen steps to the mic to issue the first orders as King Malcolm, the audience knows she is going to be a wise and just king.

This was an interesting look at a familiar classic and another enjoyable evening by the Davis Shakespeare Ensemble.