



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2019

MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

THEATER: "Scotland, PA" or, The Bloody King Of Burgers

SCOTLAND, PA ** out of ******ROUNDAABOUT AT LAURA PELS THEATRE**

Really, there are no bad ideas. It wasn't a bad idea to make a movie called *Scotland, PA*, which set Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at a burger joint in the 1970s. I mean, why not? The movie was a poorly reviewed flop, but with Maura Tierney and Christopher Walken in the cast (not to mention Andy Dick as one of the witches), it inevitably became a "cult" classic. Now, turning a poorly reviewed, flop movie into a musical, well that's certainly not a BAD idea either. Just...unexpected.

The result is *Scotland, PA* (and not, sadly, *Scotland, PA! The Musical!*). It's 1975 in Scotland, Pennsylvania where Mac (Ryan McCartan) and his wife Pat (Taylor Iman Jones) are trapped in dead-end jobs at greasy burger joint. Mac's got a ton of ideas to spruce the place up. Plastic tables that are easier to clean! Chicken nuggets! A really colorful sign with a giant "M." And a drive-through window. The guy's a genius. But his boss ignores him and won't even give the kid a try. When Mac proves the current manager is ripping the place off, the boss is mildly grateful...but insists his rebellious son Malcolm (Will Meyers) gets the job.

Modestly goaded on by Pat (mostly, she grumbles that it isn't fair), they plan to rob the place, accidentally kill the boss, buy the joint outright from Malcolm, turn it into a massive hit suspiciously like a fast food chain that also begins with "M" and plan to go nationwide! You might even say Mac is a burger king. (The book by Michael Mitnick is filled with such obvious bits.) If you know *Macbeth*, you know Mac's meteoric rise comes with an equally meteoric fall, along with ghosts, a wife haunted by her crimes and lots of blood.



Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in NYC and can be reached at mgiltz@pipeline.com

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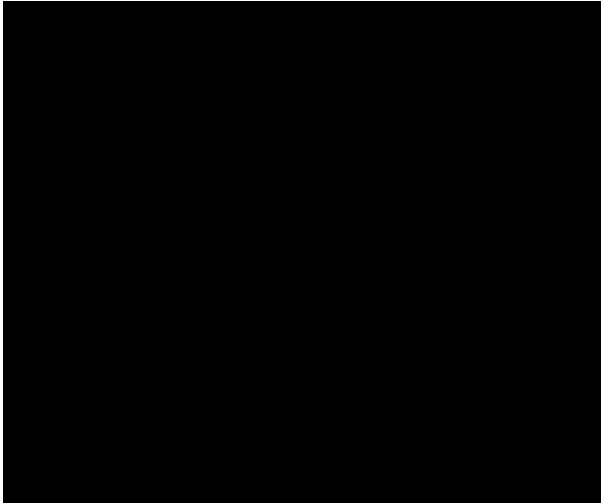
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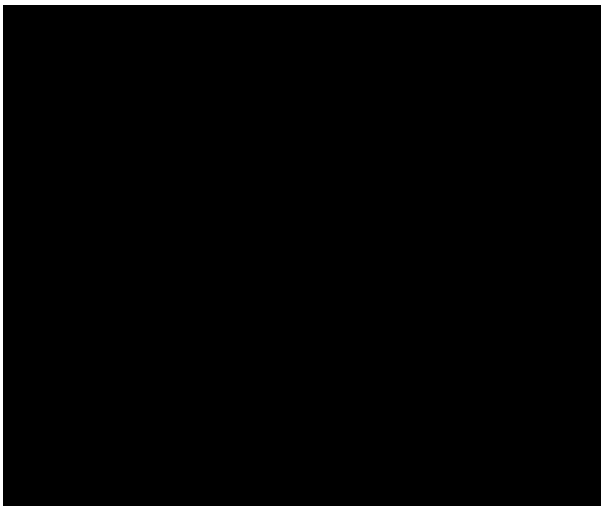
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The mostly forgettable songs by Adam Gwon serve their function and director Lonny Price does too, whether it's an efficient if anonymous early number like "Drive Thru," a quick transformation from burger dive into gleaming fast food emporium (Anna Louizos, nicely doing what's expected) or the hard-to-stage bloody finale. Apparently, their super-expensive (and pointy!) giant yellow M sits on the ground. Two numbers stand out. "Clairvoyant" is distractingly built up into the show's big number when it might have worked better in a more intimate setting. "Why I Love Football" actually moves the story forward with humor and a little heart, though even that has a filler line like "Russell does pushups."



[Here's a music video for one of the show's big numbers. It features the two stars but does not reflect the staging of the song in the actual musical.]



Worse, the book bends over backwards to make its characters more appealing. Pat, the Lady Macbeth character, hardly goads Mac on at all. Maybe she kvetches a little. And Mac seems about as ruthless as a

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disgruntled employee who *might* steal rolls of toilet paper just to stick it to the man.

Kinder characters neuter the relentless ambition which powers the original play. Mac and Pat's first murder isn't a ruthless gambit to seize power. It's an accident! Worse, the musical removes a powerful plot twist from the film. In the movie, the manager actually installs a drive-in window to great success, but still ignores Mac. In the play, he just ignores Mac's ideas, which makes the decision to burglarize the store more random than desperate. In the movie, that's their money from their idea! Hey, if you want to tell a story about pretty decent people who get in over their heads, just don't make *Macbeth*!

The trappings are still there, including three witches (here seen as three hippies), a ghostly vision during a live TV interview and that bodies-piling-up finale. But the final result is barely *Macbeth*-adjacent rather than the bloody *Macbeth* Shakespeare wrote. And that's a hamburger without meat.

Still the plot picks up in the second act and the two leads are appealing. Most everyone has a decent voice, though not always when singing those big notes for that AOR feel. Ironically, Will Meyers as Malcolm has one of the weaker voices, but still pulls off the show's best song with sex appeal and a warm presence.

Megan Lawrence killed in Broadway's *The Pajama Game*. Here Lawrence does what she can to gin up a role as a suspicious detective looking into this mess. And two veterans of Broadway's recent *On The Town* revival are together again. Alysha Umphress (who was the cabbie Hildy) has little to sink her teeth into as a hippie/witch. But Jay Armstrong Johnson as the dim but likable Banko steals what little show there is with his comic timing. He makes you think Banko's big number "Kick-Ass Party" is better than it actually is here. On the downside, he's so likable, the show's desire to keep the audience on Mac's side falls flat after he offs the poor dude.

That's a lot of talent and they make this too-harmless show bearable. The actors didn't lack for courage but the creators did. Guys, the next time you want to tackle a power-hungry tale with a villainous protagonist who slaughters everyone in his path until the curse of his greed brings him low, go for it. Screw your courage to the sticking place and you will not fail.

THEATER OF 2019

Frankenstein: Under The Radar Fest at the Public ** 1/2

Minor Character: Under The Radar Festival at the Public ***

Ink: Under The Radar Festival at the Public ** 1/2

Choir Boy ** 1/2

White Noise ** 1/2

Kiss Me, Kate ***

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Socrates **
The Pain Of My Belligerence *
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Estado Vegetal ***
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Terra Firma (debut of The Coop theater company) **
Forbidden Broadway: The Next Generation ***
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Soft Power **
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Scotland, PA **

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