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Theatre Review: More Light

Alex Mullarky reviews Michael Laird (director) and Marjan Magharehi's (producer) production of More Light by Bryony Lavery. It goes up Saturday 9th November to Monday 11th November in the Barron Theatre. Details about the remaining performances and available tickets can be found [here](#).

Michael Laird and Marjan Magharehi's production is visually striking before the performance has even begun. The black box of the Barron is set off against crimson cloth that hangs from the ceiling and adorns the set, decorated with ceremonial plates and armour in shades of gold and bronze. The background to the story is projected onto the wall: stylised illustrated animations by the talented Ekaterina Andreev tell the story of an emperor whose tomb is to be the summation of his life's work, the embodiment of his rule. He enlists the greatest minds in the kingdom to design it and convicts to dig it out of the hill. Each group is sealed into the tomb along with him so that no one may ever know its location; convicts in the outer room, the great minds in the middle, and in the inmost room, the emperor's concubines to guard his body.

Bryony Lavery's *More Light* is a story about life after death. The death of the emperor spells death for concubines, until the young, terrified More Light (named by the emperor for the way she brings light into the room) suggests an alternative: life. The first words spoken by the characters, which aren't internal, are 'Eat him'.



Akaina Ghosh's incredibly strong performance in the title role makes the show the success that it is. Her ability to engage the audience in monologues that in less capable hands could easily have become repetitive and dull was remarkable. Mandarr Brandi as Many Treasures is noteworthy for her command of the role of the practical but increasingly -and frighteningly- indifferent cook. As the group progresses from cannibalism to murder, the line between reason and chaos becomes blurred.

Art and reality begin to blur together. The ceiling of the tomb is painted as the night sky, the floor a map of the kingdom. Creative employment of tableau and mime by the director adds to the effect. The concubines are introduced with a small gesture that encapsulates their personality and their name, but by the end they are posing in tableaux for one another as they begin to develop their creative sides. For some characters, 'making' becomes a drive, where in the emperor's hands they themselves had been the art. By consuming the emperor, they discover the confidence to become 'emperors' themselves; by consuming the great minds of the empire, they discover their creativity.

Male roles are few. Tyler Anderson's appearance as the convict is short but memorable for its earnestness, and Chris Cannell as the emperor (dead throughout) must be applauded for his bravery, allowing himself to be stripped bare by his concubines. This is a play dominated by women, and their performances are wonderful; Tasmin Swanson's fear and doubt in the role of Pure Joy are palpable. The performance was let down only by the drawbacks of the Barron, for a speaker buzzed distractingly throughout the silence-heavy performance and the curtain fell open repeatedly, revealing at one point one of the 'dead' men currently being 'eaten' onstage.

Let-downs from the venue aside, the performance was stark, tense and utterly compelling. Lavery's piece is admirably performed by a strong cast in the hands of an effective and creative production team.

Alex Mullarky

Photo Credit: Eilidh Reid

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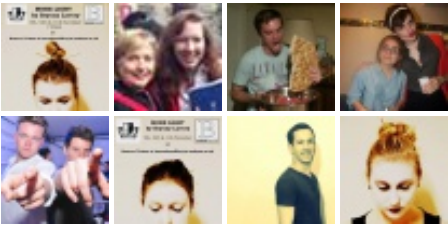
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