

## Tragic power of Macbeth

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"Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!"

That was the collective cry resounding when director Ian Farthing began rehearsals for his production of this infamous Scottish play which opens at Prescott's St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival on July 14. Show time is 7 p.m.

It runs until Aug. 14 at the Kinsmen Amphitheatre.

The tragedy has long been shrouded in a veil of superstition. While outside of a theatre the play can be spoken of openly, inside it goes that if an actor speaks the name Macbeth, he or she is required to leave the building, spin around three times, spit, curse and then knock to be allowed back in.

But Farthing isn't having any

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of that nonsense.

"I'm not superstitious," he stated flatly. "On the first day of rehearsal we addressed the subject right at the top.

"Then I had everybody shout out 'Macbeth!' three times."

There are several possible origins for this, said Farthing, who is also the company's artistic director. One is the assumption that the three witches recite actual incantations while they're boiling and bubbling around the cauldron, and still another is because there's more swordplay in this play, there are more opportunities for actors to be injured.

"There is a lot of stage-fighting and it's in the dark," noted Farthing. "I'm very excited about the stage combat, and we're very happy to have Dorian Foley back with us as fight director.

"There's going to be lots of big swords on-stage in this play. In fact, SLSF purchased two of their own this year."

The last time Foley worked with the festival was three years ago for its production of Romeo and Juliet: in fact, that was the only other tragedy which has been performed by it. But as the festival grows in depth, there's a desire to tackle a full-blown tragedy that's in "wonderful contrast" to its other production this season, Trouble on Dibble Street.

"What I like about Macbeth is that it was written towards the end of Shakespeare's career," says Farthing. "The narrative is very direct and the action trips along, its momentum is so strong.

"There's no let-up in dramatic tension."

Part of this is because Shakespeare focusses on the main characters throughout the script. and he doesn't get distracted with sub-plots.

"Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not evil," he states. "They're just passionate about each other and their potential.

"Of course, that potential goes awry, but it's too late to stop."

Farthing has set the play with a "fairly modern feel" to it, which works well as it's a timeless story. In fact, he

adds, other than Julius Caesar, in his own productions Shakespeare had them all done in contemporary dress.

This year's cast has an exciting blend of many new actors, he noted. Kris Joseph will be returning to Prescott for a three-peat to take on the role of the title character. A two-time Rideau Award nominee for his performance work, he shares a Rideau for co-writing *The Churchill Protocol* with Patrick Gauthier. Last year, he was a member of the resident acting company at the National Arts Centre, where he appeared in *A Christmas Carol* and *Mother Courage*.

"I'm excited Kris Joseph is returning," said Farthing. "He is smart actor, sexy and so good with text.

"A real joy to work with." New to the SLSF this season is

veteran actor, Mo Bock, who's particularly well-known for his work with the Thousand Island Playhouse, in Gananoque. He has also worked in Montreal at the Centaur, recently as Serge in *Art*.

He will perform Duncan and Seyward in *Macbeth*, and the lead character, Falstaff, in *TODS*.

"We are absolutely delighted to have Mo join us this year," he stated.

This past year has been an outstanding one, rthing. Advance ticket sales are up 100% from last year, and he hopes that's an indication that people are excited.

"The festival is now in its eighth season, and every year more people are coming to enjoy it," he said. "Word is getting out about the quality of the theatre here."

In a way, the tremendous of response to Shakespeare in such a small community of only 4,500 people "baffles him." On the one hand, it could be thought it would be the last place a Shakespearean festival would thrive, yet on the other, the extraordinary support of the community -and the quality of the festival's actors -makes it perfectly understandable.

"There's a sense of ownership here, a real pride in the festival," Farthing said.

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