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500 Clown twists 'Macbeth' to new level

By Max A. Herman

500 Clown "Macbeth" is so bizarre that not one moment goes by when your attention is diverted from the action. Many theater companies have offered their take on Shakespeare, but I can't imagine anyone reworking his tragedy like these three clowns (500 Clown).

What's most remarkable about 500 Clown "Macbeth," running through Saturday, May 11, at the Chopin Theatre, 1514 W. Division, Chicago, is how Paul Kalina (M. Shank), Molly Brennan (Kevin) and Andrian Danzig (Bruce) deconstruct "Macbeth" with as little dialogue as possible. Using grunts, yelps, wacky facial expressions, audience interaction and death-defying stunts (no joke), these clowns do whatever it takes to reach the crown (literally).

Dangling high above the set, the crown glistens; and watching M. Shank and his fellow characters reach for it with only metal scaffolding to support them is beyond nerve-racking. Some of their flips and maneuvers put trapeze artists to shame. At certain points the risks taken are so extreme that you're left in awe; then, moments later, 500 Clown will unleash a hilarious interaction to break up the suspense.

When the clowns didn't have their sights set on royalty, the audience had to keep on its toes to an even greater extent, with the cast (M. Shank in particular) getting up in people's faces. This was a show in itself.

Traditionalists beware: one of 500 Clown's specialties is how they improvise to even further deconstruct "Macbeth." However, no matter how much they twist Shakespeare's work, the underlying theme of violence and greed remains, emerging slowly, but steadily - and that's what's worth watching.