

UC SANTA BARBARA

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[Andrea Estrada](#)

Naked Shakes Presents Stripped Down Version of 'Macbeth'

No scenery, no props, and only minimal costumes -- just the actors, their voices, and, of course, the words. This is the essence of Naked Shakes.

A program of UC Santa Barbara's theater and dance department, Naked Shakes presents stripped down versions of plays by Shakespeare. Now in its eighth season, the company will perform "Macbeth" in a three-day run that begins on Friday, September 6, in the campus's Hatlen Theater. Admission is free.

The show, which features lecturer Jeff Mills in the title role, and senior lecturer Michael Morgan as King Duncan, will return to the Hatlen stage on October 5 to open the theater and dance department's mainstage season.

"It's not a radio play, but it's similar to the experience you get when you're listening to something and you can close your eyes and the images sort of wash over you," said director Irwin Appel, professor of theater and founder of Naked Shakes. "At the same time, though, it is wildly visual and physical -- almost like a dance or circus performance at times. The visual landscape is created by the actors in the empty space. And in that way we are really training actors who are adept with both physical movement and language. That's why this is such a great thing educationally."

While Naked Shakes serves as a tremendous academic tool for actors, it is almost as valuable for the audiences that watch the performances. "For the last two years in a row we have worked with Freshman Summer Start, a program that brings incoming freshmen to UCSB for six weeks in the summer," Appel explained. "Everyone in the program is required to see the play.

For many of these young people, he noted, the Naked Shakes production is their first cultural experience at UCSB. "And a good percentage of them may never have seen a Shakespeare play before. They may never have seen a dramatic play, in fact. And this is their first chance at it. I really feel like this is an important part of the mission," he said.

Appel selected Macbeth for this year's production because he believes it fits the Naked Shakes concept -- the idea of actors creating life out of nothing. "And 'Macbeth' is like that. It's very much about creating atmosphere out of nothing," he said.

The Naked Shakes concept has evolved over the years, and last year marked the first time the actors mimed props. Appel said he found the experience liberating. "Rather than the actor bringing the jacket he found in his closet -- which doesn't look so great -- he could mime putting on the jacket and make you believe it is a \$3,000 suit coat," he explained. "It brought a whole new dimension to it."

The barren physical theater space is also very important to the Naked Shakes concept, Appel noted. The space takes on the identity of whatever locale or particular piece of poetic language is described, and yet always reminds the audience they are in a theater. "I'm very drawn to the fact that in almost every one of his plays, Shakespeare uses the metaphor of the theater," he said. "One of Macbeth's famous speeches, for example, is 'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.' And then there's the other famous quote that 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.' It draws attention to the theater itself."

This year's production marks the first time Naked Shakes has performed in the 350-seat Hatlen Theater. In previous years, the plays have been done in smaller venues that seat no more than 100 or so. "It's a big risk for us," Appel said. "The actors have a lot of space to fill."

In conjunction with the Naked Shakes production of "Macbeth," Appel is also directing a production of the contemporary play "Equivocation" by Bill Cain. The play offers a fictional account of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which a group led by Guy Fawkes threatened to blow up British Parliament and King James. Cain explored how these events may have led to Shakespeare's creation of "Macbeth." "Equivocation" will be presented next spring, so the two shows will bookend the academic year.

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