

THEATRE *Michael Coveney*

# Scotch missed



A GREAT sense of disappointment hangs around Adrian Noble's over-elaborate revival of *Macbeth* in the Barbican for the Royal Shakespeare Company. It lumbers towards Christmas, with an interval needlessly taken after the raid on Macduff's castle.

A baby's head is smashed on the kitchen table ('That's the way to do it,' you can almost hear Mr Punch cry) and we must file out, shaken if not stirred, reassembling only for the boring 'England' scene and the fifth act.

Designer Ian MacNeil has stuck a staircase through a platform where the witches materialise in heavy robes like Munch mourners on a moving gantry. The banquet scene is noisily prepared behind a heavy blue curtain while Cheryl Campbell's mannered, manic Lady M tells Derek Jacobi that he should screw his courage to the sticking post. The whispered frenzy of the scene is lost.

Jacobi has great moments, mostly of enchantment and despair. He sings the soliloquies less compulsively than did Alan Howard earlier this year but with a tighter, more lyrical control. In leather jerkin, with a blood-stained sword (he lives up to the Bellona's bridegroom billing), he villainously embraces his fate, in defiance of Christopher Ravenscroft's prissy Banquo.

But the performance is also full of gesticulation - in particular, an annoying, bunched rattle of the right fist - and devoid of real heart and centre. He recovers well in the 'Tomorrow' speech, using great pauses to still the house. He dies onstage, pulling Malcolm's sword into his guts. There is an unfunny Porter and a dull Malcolm. Michael Siberry is an outstanding, vocally fascinating Macduff, but too good an actor to be languishing in that tedious role.

As musical biographies go, Pam

Piaf, like Judy Garland act with booze, men at act was a confession of dency, especially on the this lies the mystery of st

Close your eyes and unquestionably, in Ms Pious voice. But her performance of mere imitation. recreation of an unusual by a performer who has exposed (or exploited?) your eyes, and you see physical replica, scuttling an overactive marionette

After a series of on-stage she comes round on the microphone and chides 'Where's the song?' Piaf discriminate between private codes of decorum: restaurants (like some version of Oliver Reed); friend reads out her review him to touch her up while

This appealing transport to John Gunter's sets, a well-cast production by Wendy Morgan is a throated foil as Piaf's prostitution, and Greg Arthur and Ren Emslie ble quick-change support (Paul Arditti) and mus (Laurie Holloway) are fit

In 1978, *Piaf* was RSC show, stretching Jane Lapotaire, Zoë Wan Charleson and Malcolm directions. The text's secondary to the Brechtian resourcefulness of How studio-scale staging.

The RSC still committed new work, but in a hazardous fashion. They not digging. All of a Ayckbourn has become writer, though Wilde (Barbican, Piaf) is not of recent plays. At least a ence does at last have a c

## Coveney On Macbeth

Clipped By:



ianharris

Sun, Jan 5, 2020