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*Dramatic Publishing*

# KABUKI LADY MACBETH

by  
KAREN SUNDE

Conceived by  
Shozo Sato



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(KABUKI LADY MACBETH)

ISBN: 1-58342-333-8

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“Originally produced by Chicago Shakespeare Theater  
in the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Theater,  
Upstairs at Chicago Shakespeare,  
Barbara Gaines, Artistic Director,  
Criss Henderson, Executive Director.”

## KABUKI LADY MACBETH

This play is “the song-and-dance of Lady Macbeth,” for Ka-bu-ki means song-dance-drama. It is based on a familiar story and is full of color, spectacle and theatrical extravagance—like our musicals. So the text is simple, song-like, and its spirit is free-play, welcoming an easy rapport with the audience.

### **Production:**

Let your imagination run riot: Action scenes may expand into production numbers. Mime and dance may be used to embellish description. Sound creates an offstage court and battlefield world, against which Lady M’s and Macbeth’s private story unfolds.

An open stage with a sliding screen or drape can suggest chamber. A low platform can be a settling or sleeping area. Shredded fabric, drawn or dropped in, can present a curtain-forest. Kimonos and armor are traditional, but the form invites experimentation. Lights, costumes, music—the more colorful and dramatic, the better. Kabuki saturates the senses.

In Kabuki performance, the “Ki” (key)—wooden blocks—are struck distinctly, then in rapid succession, to punctuate scenes in places where we’d use a drum roll or a cymbal clash to say “ta-dah!”—here we go, or wasn’t that something? The “Mie” (mee-aye) pose is an instant tableau, like a snapshot that says “got this?” We do a little Mie every time we do a comic “take” (reaction) to the audience.

**Cast:**

The play is written for a cast of seven, with doubling, but more actors may be used. Apart from Lady M, Macbeth and Macduff, the roles may be cast with either women or men. The Witches work as a chorus, sometimes in unison. Distribute their lines in any way that best suits your production.

In Kabuki performance, black-clad “Koken” are employed in addition, to change sets, manipulate props, perform any backstage task in full view of the audience, scurrying as though invisible.

**Talking the talk:**

Making sense of words free in space: Whether one person or several speak a sentence, the text is meant to flow like ordinary conversation. Lines starting with a small letter mean the previous sentence is still going on. Lines starting with a capital letter mean a new sentence begins here. Ends of lines could mean a comma, a period or none. There are exceptions, but as in life, the more fun you have with it, the better it works.

*Kabuki Lady Macbeth* received its world premiere at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Chicago, Illinois, March 11, 2005. The production was directed by Shozo Sato and included the following:

## CAST

Ki Player . . . . . GREGOR MORTIS  
Witches . . . . . LAURA T. FISHER, GEORGE KEATING,  
ELIZABETH LAIDLAW  
Lady in Waiting . . . . . PEGGY ROEDER  
Lady M. . . . . BARBARA ROBERTSON  
Messenger . . . . . ANTHONY STARKE  
Macbeth . . . . . MICHAEL F. GOLDBERG  
Duncan. . . . . PEGGY ROEDER  
Macduff. . . . . ANTHONY STARKE  
Assassin . . . . . PEGGY ROEDER  
Koken . . . . . BEN DICKE, JESSE GROTHOLSON,  
ELIZABETH TANNER

## PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

Production Design. . . . . SHOZO SATO  
Scenic Design . . . . . KATHERINE ROSS  
Lighting Design . . . . . MICHAEL ROURKE  
Sound Design . . . . . LINDSAY JONES  
Assistant Director . . . . . MICHAEL F. GOLDBERG  
Casting . . . . . BOB MASON  
Production Stage Manager. . JENNIFER MATHESON COLLINS

*Kabuki Lady Macbeth* was nominated for five Joseph Jefferson Awards including “Best New Work.”

# **KABUKI LADY MACBETH**

A Play in Two Acts

## **CHARACTERS**

WITCH 1

WITCH 2

WITCH 3

LADY M (MACBETH)

LADY IN WAITING / SHOGUN DUNCAN / ASSASSIN

MESSENGER / MACDUFF

MACBETH



*Kabuki Lady Macbeth* approaches Shakespeare's story of ambition's rise and fall in the murder of their Shogun from Lady M's feminine, behind-the-scenes perspective, exploring her psychology and fate with that of her mate, Macbeth, through a prism of Asian ideals and entertainment.

LADY IN WAITING

A great battle my lady  
Your lord has won

*(MESSENGER presents a scroll, exits. LADY M unrolls long scroll, reading—)*

LADY M

“Great honors race  
behind my deeds;  
prepare your joy—  
your husband comes  
with titles fresh  
Your own Macbeth  
is new Lord Kurokawa

“To grant our full estate  
and with us celebrate—  
prepare  
the greatest feast  
our fields can raise—  
the Shogun comes tonight”

*(LADY M in shock, excitement.)*

Oh close my eyes  
so joy may hide  
her shameless face

Our preparation must be grand  
Your Lord is raised to Lord indeed  
and takes his place  
beside our Shogun Duncan  
And the Shogun comes tonight!  
Light torches, set the halls ablaze  
Let bells peal their praise  
Our hero comes!  
Set roasting fowl and fish and meats  
Make plums with sauce and sweet rice cakes  
All fruits of earth and air and seas  
must welcome him  
Awake  
Awake ourselves  
to greatness

*(Breathless—LADY M gestures, and LADY IN WAITING  
hurries away.)*

My leaping heart  
beat lightly now  
Burst not with this joy

And as for me?  
Which gown, what step, what voice of mine  
can meet this rising day—  
can life in shadows  
peeping from beneath a husband's wing  
the patient woman  
waiting for his note, his smile, his need  
prepare me for this high position?

My colors must be richer, my sleeve longer  
like my sweeping train  
my hair adorned with finer combs  
my perfumes float like blossoms  
blown on sea air  
He will expect it so

And I will speak low  
tones of splendor  
My fan I'll unfurl so—  
My gaze may be less shy  
My step must be assured of grace  
my laughter so—  
and not the laugh of lesser wives  
My bowing—a mere nod  
not so low as yesterday  
lower only than my husband's  
and the Shogun's

All this is real!       *(Begins snake dance with long scroll.)*  
This luscious letter names me  
Lady Kurokawa  
This I do not dream  
And if so, then...  
What then? Ah...  
in tomorrow's dream  
could I be Lady Shogun?

What is "being"  
but to stoke my mind  
for being more  
then stroke my senses

with a grander dream  
Why not then  
highest lady in the land—  
bowing to none  
walking the ways I say  
saying the words I will  
willing my least desire  
become command  
to every man  
beneath the Shogun

*(WITCHES come to surround LADY M, and she sees a golden throne.)*

Yes, oh yes...

WITCHES

Loose your root desire  
Let longing flow

LADY M

Ah, the gold  
on my skin  
my skin  
hot as fire

WITCH 2

Lady

WITCH 1

oh Lady

WITCH 2

do not fear  
your light rising

WITCH 1

as your shadow wanes

WITCH 3

Until you know  
what longing lies  
beneath your soul  
you won't let flow  
your destiny

LADY M

I was made  
to be more  
The highest place  
awaits me

WITCHES

Take us  
for your guide  
and grow

LADY M

I open to you now  
Let power pour into me  
until desire  
turns ripe flesh  
to hot steel  
I become

the pure tool  
of my will—  
the Shogun comes tonight

WITCH 3  
You are ready  
and you know the way

WITCH 2  
You feel the moment join—  
lives in motion

WITCH 1  
souls are met

WITCHES  
actions lap  
against a net  
of time

*(Drum announces MACBETH.)*

WITCH 1  
Your hero Lord!

WITCHES  
Give him  
the greeting he deserves

*(MACBETH enters. WITCHES depart.)*

LADY M (*coquettish*).

When great Takatori  
crept from my bed  
I didn't expect  
I'd have to accept  
bold Kurokawa  
in his stead

MACBETH

You'll have to take them both

LADY M

As my lord wills

*(They are close, express passion, then MACBETH may use a fan to mime-dance his story.)*

MACBETH

My gentle lady  
rejoice with me  
The sword of Tao was mine  
So pure my mastery  
it shattered the air

None could explain it  
My friend Macduff  
called me magic  
but the Shogun  
said I went mad—  
let go my mind  
lost myself  
to serve him

The sword  
of the samurai  
is his soul  
this sword pure-cast  
for honor  
Desires of self  
constrain it  
Only emptiness will serve  
To be at one with all  
I must be nothing

The oneness  
I attained  
cracked my brain  
and loosed  
its hidden power

The sword  
was my arm  
was my heart  
I was nothing  
Such perfection  
we cannot gain  
to kill  
but it can punish evil  
And so it was  
when, for my Shogun Duncan  
and the glory of our state  
I slew the traitor  
Kurokawa



LADY M

My love  
you bring me to ecstasy  
and yet  
your triumph is no more  
than I knew you could do  
And forcefully  
it comes to me—  
your new title  
is but one  
from Shogun

MACBETH

True—

LADY M

And my desire awaking  
tells me  
should fortune befall you  
I would be  
Shogun's Lady

MACBETH

Strange...  
I remember  
as I stood  
still hot from my kill  
wild women sang  
from the rocks  
as though emerging  
out of me—  
“Macbeth will be Shogun”

LADY M

They sang true

MACBETH

It was only my mind  
that spoke

*(WITCHES enter, speaking as they spoke then.)*

WITCH 3

Blessings, Macbeth

WITCH 2

Blessings

WITCH 1

Blessings

WITCH 2

Lord of Takatori

WITCH 1

who is now great Kurokawa

WITCH 3

will be

WITCHES

more

*(MACBETH laughs.)*

LADY M

To be Shogun  
is your Karma then

MACBETH

No  
They were nothing  
but hags on the wind

WITCH 3

Shogun

WITCH 2

Shogun

WITCH 1

Shogun

WITCHES

is the title for Macbeth

LADY M

My brave one  
do not fear  
your destiny  
It is not grace  
to deny  
the greatness  
within you  
Remember  
today  
you have done deeds

your friend calls magic  
Accept your place  
and see  
the future that awaits  
such mastery

MACBETH  
And if I agree  
what difference to me?

LADY M  
Great ends may be lost  
to those who will not  
claim them  
Are you  
man enough  
to seize your fate?

MACBETH (*amazed at her, affected*).  
You could bewitch  
the gods!  
I feel this future  
rising in me

LADY M  
Duncan comes to declare  
you his heir?

MACBETH  
Tonight it will be

LADY M

The moment he names you  
chimes a bell

*(Drums announce Duncan's approach—Koken shouts  
"the Shogun is here" offstage.)*

MACBETH

And my life begins

LADY

May his be sweet  
and short

MACBETH

Say what you mean!

LADY M

You've brought him  
under my roof  
I'm ready  
my love, to serve  
So well  
will I play your mate  
tomorrow, when sun  
floods your pillow  
a new Shogun wakes

*(Mie pose—quick tableau, then LADY M and MACBETH  
exit, and WITCHES swirl on brewing excitement and di-  
saster; giddy with mischief regarding off-stage action—*

*like the burlesque comic with his audience, impatient for the girls to reappear.)*

WITCHES

Hooo oooo, iiiiiiieeee!

WITCH 3

What have you promised, my Lady?

WITCH 1

What has she done?

WITCH 2

Lady, do not count your goal as won  
when your battle's not begun

WITCHES

And do not blame us  
if we show you horrid deeds and bloody faces

WITCH 3

What we show is neither good nor bad

WITCH 1

It falls within the scope of human kind—  
for fleetly through his life he races

WITCH 2

misconstruing what he faces

WITCH 3

rarely keeping all his graces  
Life goes as the mortal chooses

WITCHES

Do not blame us when she loses

*(Music at banquet celebration.)*

WITCH 3

But do you hear?

WITCH 1

Shogun Duncan appears

WITCH 2

the Macbeths make him welcome  
and never were hosts so sincere  
to celebrate his victory  
release the drums' thundering roll

WITCH 3

bring forth the magnificent feast

WITCH 2

until all resembles a dream  
laid before them whole

WITCH 3

And now you must pity  
our gentle Lady

that such a moment  
bewitches her soul—

WITCH 2

Imagine the greatest triumph  
you could hope for  
comes suddenly  
as though sky has opened  
above you  
showering golden  
blessings in your way

WITCH 1

enticing you on and on  
assuring the highest dream  
you can dream will come true  
if you only believe

WITCH 3

So forgive us our fable

WITCH 1

if its moral is slight

WITCH 2

To avoid its bite...

WITCHES

push back from that table!