

**Order of enjoyment:**

1. How to Catch Creation
2. Cambodian Rock Band
3. Between Two Knees
4. Macbeth
5. Alice in Wonderland

## How to Catch Creation

This was not the play that I was expecting to top my list. The article that was written about it didn't do a great job of selling the play to me, because instead of telling me about the play, it told me about the history of the black feminist movement. That was certainly an interesting read, but it didn't make me very excited to see the play. In my ranking before the trip, I said that the synopsis reads like the concept for a good sitcom, and that is sort of how it turned out to be, although it was more of a character drama than a comedy. It was definitely funny when it wanted to be, but the most memorable parts for me were the conflicts of interest between the characters as their lives became more intertwined, and the driving motivations behind those characters. My favourite aspect of the play was how it handled its theme of "creation" or childbirth. The irony of Griffin desperately wanting a child but being unable to have one while people who didn't really want a child would have one thrust upon them and have to find some way to deal with it. The biting criticism of the justice system that completely uproots an innocent man's life and never really sets him free from its own mistakes is handled really well. The way that Griffin struggles to even talk to lawyers is a detail that I certainly wouldn't have thought of but makes a lot of sense and helps to portray him as a victim of the justice system. I also like the way that the way the four characters are portrayed shines equal light on their individual flaws. No character in this play always makes the right decision, and someone who seemed like the best character one moment might make a string of bad decisions the next.

At the beginning of the play, for example, I thought that Riley was my favourite character, then Tami, then Stokes, and now I'm sure that it's Griffin. Between Natalie and Gina, my perception of who had the moral high ground kept shifting, as they both made mistakes that led them to anger with the other, but the conclusion of the play does an amazing job of reconciling their differences and showing Gina's regret for being unforgiving of her former partner. Overall, this play was incredible, and the only criticism of it that I can think of is that the amount of connections between these characters is a little far-fetched, but it's fiction, so who cares? Also, those connections help create a really good story, so I'm not complaining.

## Cambodian Rock Band

This play was everything I had hoped it would be. The only thing that I felt held it back from being number one was the way that Joe Ngo portrayed young Chum. The lines that he was saying did not at times match with the way he would say them. He would shout some of the lines at his band without the character being provoked to shout or needing to in any way (and this was when he was just a normal band member, so there wasn't any trauma yet to make him more eclectic). The way that older Chum is played is much better, though. With older Chum, Ngo strikes a far better balance between noisy and reserved.

Daisuke Tsuji as Duch really stole the show, though. The way that he guides the audience through the story while being affected by it works so well; as the play goes on, and his historical self becomes more and more troubled, the narrator form of Duch reflects these changes too. My favourite part of the play was an exchange between Duch and old Chum (one that didn't exactly happen, as it was more Duch's imagining of how Chum would react) where Duch is explaining how he was able to hide for so many years and how he decided to reveal himself to a journalist in order to atone for what he did, but he seems to know that nothing he

does will ever be enough, and that the guilt of his actions, which make him an insomniac, will not alleviate in the slightest. Even after Duch turns himself in and cooperates, both he and his imagined Chum know that it's not enough. Duch says that even after all this time, he still can't sleep (this was the most chilling line in the play for me), and questions whether he at least deserves some repose from his past, to which Chum gives a biting reply that leaves Duch distraught, and this is where the play leaves Duch's perspective. It shows how Duch was, in a way, another victim of the Khmer Rouge, except that in order to deprive him of a future they took away his humanity instead of his life.

## Between Two Knees

In my original opinion of *Between Two Knees*, I completely misjudged it. I said that its story would have to be good enough to justify its existence beyond its political message, but as it turns out, I was just thinking about it wrong. Instead of just trying to make a good story to justify itself, it decided to strip itself of the politicized nature while still retaining the ideals of it, by ridiculing everything about it. At the start of the play the narrator immediately confronts the issue of alienating the audience by joking about it. It's well done, though: you feel like you're in on the joke even as you feel uncomfortable. It's a weird feeling, and one that they manage to preserve throughout most of the play. The only thing historically accurate about this play are the dates, everything else is basically a fictional, fanciful story that doesn't take itself seriously at all. The way that its tales are both absurd and derived from pop culture serves to draw the audience into an otherwise very alien story, and provides plenty of humour from the wacky ways in which people meet their ends. One of my reservations originally about the play was that the humour would appear hamfisted in a story trying to play up the tragic aspects of itself, but this play does not at all do that. When people die, it's usually as a punchline, and abhorrent situations (like the

massacre at the start of the play) are made to be as funny and blasé as possible to keep this mood up. It just works. My favourite scene was the “Indian Birth Rites” scene. It was hilarious, because it played on how little the audience knew about how Indigenous people actually lived. In this scene, there are a group of chanting, veiled individuals, who are chanting the caveman theme from an Indiana Jones movie as they do ridiculous hand symbols, such as the finger worm or a heart. The baby was baptized in a jar labeled “white tears,” described as the “tears of a white woman named Becky, collected at her most vulnerable moment: as she was calling the cops on her black neighbours.” A close second favourite scene was the fight against the nun with chest hair in a cross. All in all, a ridiculous, hilarious story that makes fun of everything, including itself.

## Macbeth

I can write whatever I want here, because you didn’t actually see the play... So, Macbeth was played by a trained sheepdog and the actor shown in the promos was just doing a voiceover, Lady Macbeth and Duncan were two personalities of a schizophrenic poodle, and Macduff was a veterinarian who was tasked with putting down Macbeth after he went rabid and bit his owner, Banquo, and the poodle while it was Duncan.

Not really. But there were definitely some cool choices made in the portrayal of this play, just not quite so out there as what I wrote. For instance, the witches were these omnipresent entities that would act happy when things went their way and glower when they did not. They would make faces at characters they disliked (like Macduff), knowing that those characters couldn’t see them unless the witches allowed it. They added the “dead baby” scene at the beginning of the play, but they didn’t add any non-canon lines to it. They kept the Hecate scene in, and did a really good job of emphasizing her power over the witches. Also, the attire was

18th-century when not in battle and medieval when armor-clad. Some characters wore more contemporary clothing, like Macduff's son (who wore sneakers) and Macbeth (who wore a tank top underneath his more 18th-century business attire).

How much did I enjoy the play, though? Quite a bit. The actors put a lot of emotion in their deliveries which would help you infer the message of a more convoluted line. They stayed in character throughout, and understood what their character was saying. The non-canon scenes are where this play shines, however. They don't add any extra lines, so these scenes are completely silent, but the way that they are planned out spells out what is happening perfectly. In the "dead baby" scene, the disturbing, jagged wailing noises made by the invisible witches and the way that the Macbeths are hunched over this small coffin-like object tells you immediately what is going on, and it lingers long enough to show how distraught they are. In the scene where they show Lady Macbeth hanging herself, the lighting makes it very clear that her wrapping the aerial silks around her neck is her hanging herself. The time of day that the play showed at accentuated the amazing lighting in all the scenes, but you really noticed the effect of that lighting during those added scenes.

## Alice in Wonderland

This one was kind of disappointing. Honestly, I thought it was a pretty good play if you were experiencing it in a vacuum, but as we weren't, it just had far more issues than the other plays. The first issue that I had with it was the way that they portrayed Alice. In the books, Alice is a much nicer person than they show her as in this adaptation. She usually tries to comfort or support residents of Wonderland who appear distraught and is usually upbeat. When she isn't like this, she doesn't throw tantrums, as in this adaptation, but becomes discouraged or depressed. In this version, she is very temperamental; her mood can be one moment excited, the

next sulking, the next puzzled. The Alice of the books has much more general moods, and doesn't really sulk, instead when she is disappointed or angry she either tries to resolve it or express it. However, I think that they got her curiosity down excellently. In both the play and the books, she doesn't dwell very long on anything, and when something else comes along to grab her attention and lead her further into Wonderland, she usually follows that inclination without a second thought. However, another thing that this adaptation seems off about is the White Rabbit. In the book, the White Rabbit leads Alice through Wonderland by popping up and attracting her curiosity, and watches over her progress through Wonderland with equal curiosity. In the play, however, it (she?) mainly does cameos, popping up at times but not often being noticed by Alice, making it (her?) seem more like a pointless character than anything, and not showing the same interest in Alice's adventures as the book White Rabbit does.

Everything else about the play was fairly well done, though. The White Queen was done especially well, as she exhibited the strange time-bending personality of the book Queen, where she would act in equal parts like a petulant child, a chiding adult, and a flaky old lady. She kind of redeemed the second half of the play with the weirdness that she exudes, even if her presence sometimes made Alice sulky.