

Cold as Death at Capital Fringe

July 13, 2015 by [Tim Treanor](https://dctheatrescene.com/author/tim-treanor/) (https://dctheatrescene.com/author/tim-treanor/)

About three-quarters of the way through this play, I realized that I was watching the theatrical equivalent of the 1930s horror movies I used to watch at 2 AM in the rec room when my parents were asleep. A despicable villain (here played by Nello DeBlasio) is about to do a fabulously offensive thing (in this case, violate the corpse of a woman he could not have in life). Plus, it is the Middle Ages, where the hand of God and the Devil were upon the land. Surely I am about to see a supernatural act of vengeance which will make my heart feel like it is exploding out of my chest!

Except, of course, this isn't a 1930s horror movie. Rather, it is an untitled play written in 1611 and generally referred to as *The Second Maiden's Play*; most academics attribute it to Thomas Middleton. Here, Monique LaForce has jazzed things up, renaming it and bringing it into the contemporary world, and director Catherine Aselford adds modern dress and weapons.



(<https://www.capitalfringe.org/events/594-cold-as-death>)

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Good King Govianis (Dane Peterson) has been overthrown by a tyrant (DeBlasio), and the tyrant pronounces his doom on the deposed monarch: Govianis will be exiled and banished, but not before seeing the tyrant wed Govianis's betrothed (Cate Brewer). The tyrant is undone, however, by the Lady's love and honor; she will not leave her fiancée even for a Kingdom. The frustrated tyrant sends the couple away to a manor near his new castle, and thereafter sends the woman's

father (Terence Aselford) and then his trusted lieutenant (Angela Kay Pirko) to change her mind. They both fail, and the tyrant resolves to take the Lady by main force. Before he can succeed, however, she dies.

But the tyrant is a persistent cuss, and, in violation of the laws of God and nature, he breaks open her tomb and escapes with her body, preparing for further depredations. I shan't tell you more, except that God Shall Not Be Mocked.

Like those 1930s movies, this piece is full of suspense, horror, and furious action; had Middleton been born three hundred years later I have no doubt he could have made good money writing scripts in Hollywood. This is not Shakespeare (although some scholars believe that it is actually the script for the Bard's lost play *Cordelia*); there are no witty lines and no profound insights. It is what it is, and what it is is just fine.

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Cold as Death

Adapted from Thomas Middleton by Monique LaForce

Directed by Catherine Aselford

[Details and tickets \(https://www.capitalfringe.org/events/594-cold-as-death\)](https://www.capitalfringe.org/events/594-cold-as-death)

Plus — I gotta tell you, Terence Aselford is one of the best classical actors in Washington. I could see him playing Adam in *As You Like It*, or Feste in *Twelfth Night*, or even Lear. He doesn't act that much nowadays, but when he does, it's generally worth the price of admission. In this play, he has to do a one hundred eighty degree turn in the character's point of view, and he does it convincingly.

Other actors, particularly Brewer and Pirko in multiple roles, do good work too. For reasons unknown to me, the producing company, Guillotine Theatre, will rotate the actors playing the tyrant, and as a result DeBlasio did the role script-in-hand, and I presume the other tyrants will too. Notwithstanding this distraction, DeBlasio did well; he used the script only occasionally, and to find his place at the top of his dialogue, and added some subtlety to a role which appeared to be designed principally to Do Disgusting Things.

I am sorry to report that Petersen, who I've seen do good work in other plays, seems to be miscast as Govianus. He gives us an angry and disheartened character — and I would be annoyed, too, if I had been deposed and told that my fiancée would marry my usurper — but he does not give us the man in full, as an actor must when he is playing the protagonist. Petersen's voice does not vary much in this role, and he seems to approach his betrothed in tender moments with the same earnest emphasis with which he defies his usurper.

There are occasional breaks in the fictive dream — dead characters get up and walk away in full view of the audience; the director and cast wrestle furniture onto the stage. This may be a requirement of the Eastman Theatre's configuration and as I sat there I could not think of an alternative way to get things on and off the stage. It is a distraction, but the story is so strong that it is not a disturbance.

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About Tim Treanor

Tim Treanor is a senior writer for DC Theatre Scene. He is a 2011 Fellow of the National Critics Institute and has written over 700 reviews for DCTS. His novel, "Capital City," with Lee Hurwitz was published November 1, 2016. He lives in a log home in the woods of Southern Maryland with his dear bride, DCTS Editor Lorraine Treanor. For more Tim Treanor, go to [timtreanorauthor.com](http://www.timtreanorauthor.com). (<http://www.timtreanorauthor.com>)

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