

“The Tanner”

By Samantha Simmonds-Roncero - 06/17/2022



A NoHo Arts [theatre review](#) of "The Tanner," written and performed by Alex McSherry, and produced by [Fringe Management](#) and Samantha de Gyarfas at this year's [Hollywood Fringe Festival](#).



Alex McSherry is no stranger to Fringe. Although this is his first Hollywood Fringe Festival, he has more than 30 Edinburgh Fringe shows under his belt, as well as 40 years in the business of acting, writing and directing. His latest play, "The Tanner" combines his love of history with his love of writing and performing, and chronicles the battles fought against the English by the infamous and much loved Scott, William Wallace. Being a tanner is his trade, but like many men in his day, he fought for his country when called upon, and he was called upon many times during the reign of the reviled King Edward I of England during the late twelfth century.

The play begins in the early morning as the tanner wakes in his chair. He proceeds with his usual routine, piddling in a bucket for longer than seems entirely possible, checking on his tanning hides in said same bucket and rinsing out his mouth from the previous night's whisky and beer in, you guessed it, the same bucket. Well, it was the 12th century I suppose. He addresses us, as if guests in his house, and then begins to tell his tale of war and family and lost loves. Although he is a warrior at heart, he loves his maker, his family and his country in seemingly equal measure. But, as we discover, his family is long dead, one son in a battle and another to childhood illness, and his wife to grief. Yet, he remains, much to his wonder and he takes comfort in the belief that he will join them all soon.

But this play is as much about the battles as the nanner. He is our guide through a first-hand retelling of the battles of Stirling Bridge and Falkirk, battles in the first war for Scottish independence where the Scotts defeated the English army so brutally and completely that it became legend, and then were in turn defeated at Falkirk. Our guide puts us in the thick of it, ax in hand, following the orders of Wallace, and side by side with his young son. With vivid detail, he paints a picture of the day. The steam of the horses' breath, the screams of the men, the anger from years of hatred and defiance. He describes every moment of the fights, the strategies, the bravery and the death. How they were standing in the blood and the mud and the shit of their enemy and how all men die the same in the end.

"The Tanner" is brutal, yes, but deeply beautiful, poetic and heartfelt. There's no blood lust really in his prose, only justice and pride and a love of his fellow countrymen.

Alex McSherry is astonishing in "The Tanner." Totally present, a born storyteller he strides about the stage flexing and thrusting and with his arms wide he beguiles us with his giant Scottish heart.

I left sniffing, deeply moved and flushed with his words still ringing in my ears. I'm English and happy to be, but there's much I'm sorry for in my country's past, and the times we are in demand a retelling of ancient wrongs and an understanding of the sacrifices many made.

“The Tanner” is a work of art, truly. I urge you to see this master class of story and stage acting. Bloody bravo indeed!



When:

Saturday, June 18, 11:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 22, 6:30 p.m.

Friday, June 24, 8:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 25, 10:30 p.m.

Where:

The Broadwater Black Box
6322 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90038

Tickets:

<https://www.hollywoodfringe.org/projects/7529?tab=tickets>

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https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4303729/?ref_=nv_sr_srsq_0

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