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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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"Black Watch" At St. Ann's Warehouse

With the clock falling back, a rave in the New York Times, sold out shows and the constant, almost hectoring reminders of St. Ann's that people arriving late for "Black Watch" simply would NOT get in, we made sure to arrive very early indeed for this Scottish play about the fabled military regiment -- think of it as their Marines, perhaps. The form, indeed the story itself, is very familiar. Vets back from a punishing war are wary of talking to a writer, who wins them over by offering to pay for their beer even if he does ask banally obvious questions and keeps insisting "I understand" when of course the whole point is that he doesn't understand and needs to ask questions so he can start. Then we flash back to their time in Iraq, with soldiers salivating over the various food they'll eat when back home, taking turns ordering their meals at a Chinese restaurant and then an Indian one while riding in the back of a transport vehicle. They fight, they curse, they look at porn, they show little interest in the politics back home, they duck when the shelling comes too close and sometimes they die.

So the content for me was familiar, as it would be to anyone who's done a modicum of reading about soldiers during war. But what was genuinely thrilling was the direction and choreography of "Black Watch." Director John Tiffany makes full use of the space, with actors roaring about from one end to the other. A constantly shifting perspective has actors up in the scaffolding at one moment followed by others across the room on the ground at the next. Scenes flow seamlessly into one another, costume changes sometimes take place in full view, and something as simple as three men leaning back in their chairs and slamming down onto the ground in unison can be quietly mesmerizing. Two especially vivid moments stick out. The first was the scene of soldiers reading letters from home (one after another reads mutely, lets their letter fall to the ground and then begins to perform in sign language what they're feeling or what they've read or what they

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