

# Review for King Lear

Opening night, 24<sup>th</sup> August  
2016, Elmwood Auditorium,  
Merivale.

It is always hard to get past the fact that Shakespeare productions come with high expectations; For actors, Shakespeare is for the brave only. On the opening night of King Lear, the Repertory Theatre Company succeeded in showing off their bravest actors.

The play is known for the spiralling descent into madness and despair; why then would anyone want to come and see this? The biggest reason here is not flashy sets or the coveting of lavish medieval costumes, it is for the dedication and delivery from a set of fine actors who will tell the story in such a way as to remind us of the dark side that secretly lurks within complex human beings – the need to stop and stare and be moved – to see shades of ourselves played out before us, to acknowledge there is a need to watch and have empathy. This play works well in this endeavour.

Director Julian Anderson has chosen to set his Lear in the modern world of the business empire. The sets are minimal and require the imagination to work overtime, which is not a bad thing. I find that quite often in long plays if you don't have to work hard as an audience member and stay with the plot, you will get lost. The lighting was reminiscent of a Rembrandt painting which suited the mood of the story and gave the actors the extra drama that they needed to sell their performances – and sell them they did.

The dynamics of the play worked well. The pace was whirled along with snappy transitions and a cast

of dedicated character actors working hard to fill the stark space with definition. I shall mention the support actors first because without these actors to balance the composition of seething family members it could become difficult to navigate the play. These actors are like signposts within the plot and give the lead actors a chance to breathe, which I guess is why Shakespeare made such use of them. And so, too numerous to mention, you know who you are, and I applaud you all, for your patience and your stamina and your knowing how to keep the focus on the lead roles.

There is no doubt that Lear is a sought after role for senior male actors who are serious about proving their worth on the boards. It can be a scary, soul-baring role to play, and requires total focus and understanding of the character's nuances. Michael Adams rose to the challenge with a clear talent for holding an audience; not a word was wasted.

The bitches of the play were not disappointing. Emma Price (Regan) and Annette Thomson (Goneril) play out the drama of Lear's manipulative banshee daughters with a realism that perhaps would worry their real parents. The matching hapless sons-in-law of Lear played by Andrew Bell (Duke of Albany) and Lance McBride (Cornwall) have a really good presence despite the danger in this play for creepy Dukes to be upstaged by their nasty women. It must be admitted we all love a good loathsome female character and in this play there are two! Huzzah!

Of course, there always has to be the good girl in the plot and Ella Wallace (Cordelia) is well cast in her role. It is a shame that the role of Cordelia spends so much time banished from the stage, as her acting ability comes across strongly.

Lear's loyal friend, the Earl of Kent was played well by Roanna Dalziel. It is unusual to have a woman in this role and the play did not suffer because of this decision. Dalziel delivered a performance that was honest and believable, which is what was needed. Dalziel showed she is a valuable actor for the company, proving her great flexibility and skill.

Playing another traditionally male role was Emily Twemlow (The Fool). Again she made the part her own, and there was clearly a lot of input from the actor towards her character's mannerisms. She made it look like a lot of fun to play while delivering the all important wit that the character brings to the plot. Well done, and great costume! I loved it.

Tight performances were also given by the Gloucester trio: Dimitri Gibara (Gloucester), John Bayne (Edmund, the illegitimate son of Gloucester) and Noam Wegner (Edgar, son of Gloucester) I have to give a special mention here to Wegner's exceptional delivery of Edgar as a madman. This was a real highlight of the play and his total immersion into the character was commendable. The truth is, if it had my kids talking about it in the car on the way home and even the next couple of days, it must be counted as a true highlight – they are not easy to please!

King Lear, as performed by The Repertory Theatre Company is a night out during which an audience can be transported. True, it is not for the fidgety or for those who want to relax but that is okay. It is a serious play, about the serious issue of inheritance, played by a company of actors with serious talent. Go and see it and appreciate the passion this cast displays for your entertainment.

**-Sonya Pegg**