

Lear in strong voice

Review

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THEATREiNQ's *King Lear*

THEATREiNQ performers delivered a dynamic opening show of *King Lear* to a large and appreciative audience in Queens Gardens.

The play addresses the theme of a parent's disenchantment with the rebellious and unappreciative child, and deals with the breakdown of family.

Director Terri Brabon assembled an accomplished and talented cast to present this classic Shakespearean tragedy in an open-air setting on Tuesday evening.

Brabon was successful in maintaining the clarity of plot and sub-plot through astute direction and effective dove-tailing of scenes.

The strong voices of the lead actors resonated through the night air with almost perfect diction to unravel the complex plot.

The less-experienced members of the ensemble need to be constantly mindful of the need to maintain projection.

In the title role, veteran Shakespearean actor John du Feu gave a commanding performance as the ageing king whose clarity of purpose is clouded by his need for the professed love of his daughters.

Although *King Lear*'s actions do not draw sympathy from the audience, there is, by the end of the play, an understanding of how he has been pushed beyond the boundaries of sanity.



COMMANDING PERFORMANCE: John du Feu and Anna Wallace in a scene from *King Lear*.

The physical and mental decline of the old man was handled with sensitivity and skill, drawing the audience to the inevitable outcome for the tragic hero.

Brabon as the selfish and ruthless Goneril and Arminelle Fleming as the vindictive Regan gave convincing performances throughout. Their vocal strength and physical presence provided the driving force for many of the scenes.

Anna Wallace played Cordelia with an air of simple honesty and truth, which made her endearing.

Brendan O'Connor as the unfailingly loyal Earl of Kent delivered another out-

standing performance, particularly as his "incognito" persona. There were moments when he held the audience spellbound.

O'Connor's natural style made his character not only credible, but it became the universal man who connected with the audience on a common ground.

As we watched his well-lit exit, there was a feeling of disappointment that we would never meet this character again.

Strong performances were also given by Michael Gleeson (Edmund), Brian Edmond (The Fool) and Bernie Lanigan as the Earl of Gloucester, although the

eye-gouging scene did not convey the full horror the situation inferred or demanded. Undoubtedly this scene will grow as the season progresses.

Special mention should also be made of the Bedlams.

The haunting vocals and the focus of these players provide the insight of stark reality for both audience and the character of Lear within the plot.

The costumes, although somewhat suggestive of medieval style, seemed designed to suggest status rather than era; however use of colour successfully symbolised differing groups and allegiances.

Set designer Brendan O'Connor has produced a visually interesting and functional environment which is reflective of a *Mad Max* movie.

Predominantly black and cleverly lit, the set conveyed the timeless impression of a castle fortress with well-appointed entrances and exits that allowed the scenes to flow seamlessly from one to the next.

The whole performance was neatly and subtly tied together by use of an effective soundtrack which served to highlight moments of tension and set the overall mood.

THEATREiNQ's production of *King Lear* is an engrossing one which is accessible and appealing to old and young alike.

The last five minutes of the play alone is worth the price of the ticket, but audiences will be treated to a moving, thought-provoking performance by a consistently strong ensemble.

Remember to take some head-covering as the possums and bats are active and their aim is improving.

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***King Lear* plays under the stars at Queens Gardens (Gregory St entrance) Tuesday to Saturday at 6.30pm until September 29 and at 5pm on Sunday. Tickets are \$37 adults, \$30 concessions and \$25 for under 18. Tickets available online at theatreinq.com or by calling 0467 245 478. Some tickets may be available before the show at the box office tent.**