



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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ANTIGONE

University of Adelaide Theatre Guild

Little Theatre

Until 26 May 2012

Review by Jamie Wright

Jean Anouilh's adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy has a somewhat daunting history; it was first performed in Nazi-occupied France (one hopes those reviewing this production will be spared the comparison) as commentary on the occupation and how it was (or wasn't) resisted. Subsequent productions have featured some of the finest talent to take the stage.

It is the story of Antigone, who defies the ruling of her uncle Creon, now king of Thebes; in the wake of the civil war begun by Antigone's brothers Eteocles and Polyneices, he has decreed that the body of the former will be given a state funeral while, to serve as an example, the body of the latter will be left on the field of battle, unburied, for the vultures and the elements.

Director Edwin Kemp Attrill, using Lewis Galantière's translation of the script, has his cast constantly moving on Lillian Chester's almost bare stage, backed with a towering monolith; the players are clad in various combinations of black and white, leaving the focus on the characters and the dialogue.

Sara Lange is excellent as Antigone, developing in the strength throughout the play. Michael Baldwin, as Creon, is great as the consummate politician; persuasive and reasonable until his breaking point is reached. Karen Burns as Ismene provides excellent contrast, hesitant and demure compared to her wilful and determined sister. Lesley Reed combines compassion and wisdom as Nurse.

Tom Cornwall plays a restrained Haemon, out-nobled by the sacrifice of his fiancée, Antigone. A commanding Nicole Ritty is aloof and scathing as Chorus. Tony Sampson is good as Guard 1; Adrian Skewes as Guard 2, though, seems somewhat uncomfortable in the part, and his pivotal scene with Creon lacks the necessary weight. Rosemary Jackson is mostly voiceless as Euridyce, Creon's wife, but conveys her character's emotions well enough without it – and when she does speak, it's to great effect.

Lighting, by Stephen Dean, is clever and impactful. It is frequently off-centre, providing pools of light that the characters often hover around. This works well in tandem with Rory Chenoweth's sound; both ebb and flow with the tensions amongst the characters.

The result is a tense, engrossing production with many excellent moments – particularly the second act stand-off between Antigone and Creon, who circle each other like boxers in the ring, throwing rhetorical punches back and forth.

The play, or at least this version of it, is clearly a product of its time, stylised and somewhat 'arty' – but not in a bad way; the timelessness of the thought-provoking themes (obviously; plays lacking this don't tend to still be produced two and a half millennia after they were written) and the directorial decisions allow it to both retain the feel and still convey the ambiguity, all in a compelling way.