



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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Supporting live theatre in South Australia

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ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

Stirling Players Inc.

Stirling Community Theatre

Until 10 Mar 2018

Review by Thomas Filsell

My expectations in anticipation of this production were very high – “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead” is one of all-time favourite plays, and I had only recently seen the brilliant National Theatre Live production, recorded in 2017 – they were, to my great satisfaction, not only met, but exceeded.

“Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead” tells the story of the two eponymous characters as the events of Shakespeare’s Hamlet unfold about them. They struggle with meaning, memory and powerlessness while trying to be the protagonists of their own story in a world where a greater narrative and series of events over which they have no control subsumes, consumes and confounds them. Guildenstern in particular tries to find or construct meaning for himself and to gain a modicum of control of his circumstances, but such efforts are futile in a story that has been told with an ending that has been determined.

Guildenstern is played masterfully by Alex Antoniou, who perfectly captures the character’s thoughtfulness and angst, whilst also delivering on the comedy of the part to great effect and in an appropriately restrained manner. He was also able to reach the necessary emotional heights and to become menacing when appropriate, but never excessively in a way that made him any less sympathetic.

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern’s less pensive, perhaps slightly more inscrutable counterpart, is portrayed by the hilarious Mark Healy. Healy had the perfect style and physicality for Rosencrantz, and never failed to make us laugh or worry at the right moments. The chemistry between him and Antoniou is just what it should be for this play – equal but different, fraternal but combative, united but contrary, awkward, ambiguous.

Tim Williams played The Player with a gruff, formidable vocal tone and suitably theatrical movements and style; he was perfect for the part.

The rest of the cast were fantastic – it is very difficult to find fault with the acting. Nick Duddy was a suave, strong, slightly frightening Hamlet; Gary George and Michelle Nightingale were doughty and decent as Denmark’s king and queen, and along with Peter Bleby as Polonius and Chloe Zodrow as Ophelia, were surprisingly sympathetic.

The Tragedians – Shaun Castles, Rebecca Kemp, Dylan O’Donnell, Alyssa Peters and Leighton Voight – each had shining moments and provided comedy and intrigue while on stage, but without inappropriately stealing focus from the main action of the play.

The set was rustic and clear, consisting of a number of cleverly written, often funny, wooden road signs and moveable wooden or cloth props that together felt like something you might find in a good rural Australian hotel or restaurant bar. The lighting design was also redolent of the Australian outback, consisting mainly of yellow, red and orange hues that really made this production feel relevant and close



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to home. Who would have thought that a play written by a Czech-Brit and set predominantly in a historical, somewhat fictionalised Denmark would work so naturally in an Australian setting?

The play was presented in three acts with intermissions of about fifteen minutes between the first and second and second and third acts. This was a good decision despite making a long play longer, as it allowed the audience to stretch their legs, refresh and refocus their attention (and go to the bathroom), and the actors to regroup, revitalise, and revivify. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are very demanding, challenging roles for an actor, with many lines and a lot of stage business to do, and the intervals ensured the right level of focus and vitality was maintained throughout the play.

Director Hayley Horton has brought a hilarious, intelligent, aesthetically pleasing production of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" to the South Australian stage, with a cast that excels; scenery, props and lighting designed perfectly to purpose; and just enough Australiana to make it feel particularly relevant even here and now, more than fifty years after its first production at Edinburgh's 1966 Fringe Festival.

If you enjoy the theatre, thoughtful humour and existentialist themes of absurdity and meaninglessness, or if you have even a passing familiarity with Shakespeare's plays, particularly Hamlet, then this production of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" by the Stirling Players is not to be missed.

A sterling production by the Stirling players.