



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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THE MAN WHO WROTE SHAKESPEARE

David Cronin

Star Theatres – Star Theatre Two

Until 21 Feb 2021

Review by Fran Edwards

The writer of this interesting piece, David Cronin, states in an interview that his intention is not to change people's beliefs, but to pique their interest. Cronin has obviously conducted a lot of research and given the subject much thought. He has crafted a play that presents the possible/probable scenario for the writing of the plays during his imprisonment in the Tower of London. The evidence that Cronin presents for believing that Sir Henry Neville was the writer is convincing, but the Narrator swears the audience to secrecy to avoid the wrath of the Queen.

Russell Starke is completely believable as Sir Henry, showing all of the many moods that must have bedeviled this learned man if he did indeed create these masterpieces. Although Starke is the mainstay of this production, he is very well supported by the two actors who play the many characters who surround him. Emily Jo Davidson greets the audience as the Narrator but doubles throughout as Neville's Muse and his Fool. Demonstrating her ability to change characters with her costume Davidson also effectively portrays the ghost of his mother, his wife and Queen Elizabeth I. Her performance as the queen is amusing and suitably regal.

Charles Herks is similarly adept at characterization. Herks plays Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, a fellow inmate in the Tower. At various times he also represents Ben Johnson, playwright, Robert Cecil, Secretary of State Henry Killigrew (Henry's father-in-law and advisor to the Queen. For each reincarnation he appears different, with the characters being of differing ages and stature. He is particularly effective as Killigrew a much older man.

The very experienced Starke is compelling to watch, and director Malcolm Harslett has created a suitably depressing atmosphere on a simple set with several projected backgrounds and lights provided by Luke Bartholomew. The music was unpretentious and sung by Davidson to a lute backing track. The whole production poses an interesting train of thought, which may be true.

Rating: 4 stars (out of 5)