



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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THE MADNESS OF GEORGE III

Adelaide Repertory Theatre

Arts Theatre

Until 25 June 2022

Reviewed by Fran Edwards

Angela Short has assembled a cast of experienced actors to tackle this Alan Bennett play that examines the illness (usually referred to as the madness) of King George III, the first king from the house of Hanover to be born in England. Often called Farmer George, he was a popular king married to a German Princess, Charlotte of Meckleburg-Strelitz, who he met on his wedding day and remained faithful to for life. The play looks at the role of his son George, Prince of Wales (later to become George IV) in the controversy that embroiled the later part of his reign. The foppish Prince was eager to succeed his father after many years as heir and encouraged the rumours that his father was mad.

In this mess of politics and royal issues the two lead players are Lindsay Dunn as the King and Tom Tassone as his ambitious son. Dunn gives a strong performance, showing the many aspects of the character and Tassone is totally believable as the indolent and conniving son. Other family members also do well: Kate Anolak as the Queen gives us a patient woman, supporting her husband but constrained by protocol, whilst Jamie Wright plays the intimidated Duke of York with a bemused expression.

The other players in this drama are the politicians and the doctors in league with each other and playing against each other to achieve their personal outcomes. The doctors who torment and attempt to cure the King are played by Peter Davies (Sir George Baker), Anthony Vawser (Dr Richard Warren), Maxwell Whigham (Sir Lucas Pepys) and Joshua Coldwell (Dr Francis Willis) with their variety of bleeding, blistering, cupping and examinations of his excrement!

The main politicians who are vying for control of the government are played by Leighton Vogt, who gives us a great look at William Pitt (the Younger), Steve Marvanek as Charles Fox the opposition leader eager to become Prime Minister, and Jack Robins as the influential powerbroker Lord Edward Thurlow playing both sides. The witty dialogue at times has echoes of our own politics.

Rebecca Kemp is Lady Elisabeth Pembroke, the Queen's Lady-in-Waiting, subjected to harassment by the King. Many of the minor roles are filled by women playing Lords and servants – notably Rose Harvey (Richard Sheridan), Jenny Allan (Captain Charles Fitzroy) and Leah Lowe (Robert Greville), and including Heather Riley, Rose Vallen, Lucy Johnson, Chelsea Lancione and Jenny Allard (as the particularly amusing Ramsden Skrymshir).

This potentially great production is I believe hampered by the lack of audience, it is difficult to maintain such a wordy show without people to play to. With a well-thought-out set, colourful costumes and good production values, this should have been much more than it was.