

## A treatise on mortality that is oddly surfacy

**SHOW: ENDGAME**

**CAST: Guy De Lancey, Adrian Collins, Nicholas Ellenbogen, Liz Szymczak**

**VENUE: The Intimate Theatre until August 28**

**REVIEW: Peter Tromp**



Adrian Collins and Guy De Lancey in 'Endgame'

"Nothing is funnier than unhappiness." So rings perhaps the most famous line in Samuel Beckett's 'Endgame,' a play that really envelops one in a general apocalyptic state of discomfiture. The line is reportedly the playwright's favourite in his celebrated oeuvre. It is one of those attention grabbing lines that designers of programmes love to include in their pre-show kits, yet it is delivered by Liz Szymczak in the show with maximum understatement. That moment underscores a lot of what is beautiful about Luke Ellenbogen's interpretation of Beckett's work, but also what is deficient in other areas of the show.

The young director's 'Endgame' is so delicate at times that it appears to be wafting on stage, until it practically lacerates one with stinging, cathartic moments that feels completely at odds with the overall tonality of his production.

The whole thing amounts to an unsatisfying management of the differing moods in the work on the part of Ellenbogen, but there is no disputing the moments of beauty he delivers in liberal little doses throughout the play.

The result is an odd mixture of fashion and sincerity. It is obvious a lot of care and attention has gone into the design of the show, and Ellenbogen successfully immerses one in an almost dreamlike Nowheresville, but there were too many little moments that felt like a bit of a put-on. The production just does not penetrate deep enough. Adrian Collins for once struck me as not exactly in tune with the subterranean depths of the play. It is an oddly surfacy performance from the actor who is normally so good at conveying the undercurrents of any work he is in.

Guy De Lancey fares much better in transcending the stylised-ness of the play. The actor's almost preternatural composure serves him well in his evocation of the invalid Hamm. His usually calm exterior lends a menacing air to proceedings, especially since he is so successful in telegraphing the barely concealed discord and frustration at the core of his character.

The aforementioned Szymczak and Nicholas Ellenbogen are simple delights as the disembodied talking heads Nell and Nagg. Zymszek is only on stage for a very small period of time, but she makes every moment count. I'm not even sure what she does here strictly qualifies as acting, because what she delivers is just so naturalistic. It was brave of the young Ellenbogen to attempt a work that is so complex and formulated, and to cast his parents in it to boot.

He has delivered a production that while it doesn't hit the heights of the other Mechanicals shows this season, is nonetheless absorbing, entertaining and rather funny at turns. It just doesn't feel lived in properly.

At this stage, I guess I'm supposed to say that all of this will come with age, but that is to insult the work that the young director has delivered in the past that brimmed with maturity. No doubt he has plenty more to offer. 'Endgame' might be flawed, but at least it isn't lacking in ballsiness.

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