

## **A game to end all games**

**Review by Gill Gimberg (August 12, 2010)**

*Endgame*, the Mechanicals' fourth play, more than lives up to the stellar standards set by the first two productions of their 2010 repertory season.

Director Luke Ellenbogen and his cast do more than justice to Samuel Beckett's challenging script. I find Beckett's plays almost impossible to read, so I stand in awe of a director and actors who succeed in presenting an 'unputdownable' play. And *Endgame* falls into that category. The subject matter is serious; the questions asked are deep philosophical and metaphysical questions; the dialogue is smart, almost poetic, and the concept - a verbal (and sometimes amusingly physical) chess game, where the players return constantly to 'check' - is brilliant. But despite all that, *Endgame* is genuinely funny.

Sure you get whacked on the head a few times, but the medicine is applied with a large dose of sugar. This is entertainment, but you can't walk out of the theatre without the feeling that you've 'taken the cure' - the hallmark, of course, of true tragicomic theatre. The acting is superb from start to finish.

Hamm, the master, is played by Guy de Lancey and Clov, his servant / son opponent, by Adrian Collins. Hamm's ageing parents, Nagg and Nell, are played by Nicholas Ellenbogen and Liz Szymczak. Confined to a wheeled wing-back chair, Hamm is a blind paraplegic who relies on Clov, who cannot sit and walks with difficulty, for all his physical needs.

The two engage in a never-ending verbal chess game from which neither can withdraw - Hamm because he needs Clov, and Clov because without Hamm he would be nothing. Nagg and Nell are confined to two tin dustbins, from which they periodically squirm up into the limelight and deliver some of the most profound, touching and funny lines. These might be supporting roles, but they're not to be underestimated. The characters' world is a bleak bunker in a post-apocalyptic environment.

There are some screamingly funny moments, among them the discovery of a single flea down Clov's pants. Clov's overreaction is pure farce as he dances around the stage dousing himself in copious amounts of flea powder.

The positioning of Hamm's chair - 'in the centre, a little more to the right / left / back / forwards, don't stand behind me!' - is another of these.

But, as Dario Fo, the Italian writer / director / actor of comedy and farce has pointed out, both genres have a very serious undercurrent which addresses the real tragedies of human existence, and makes one think about those issues which we tend to push aside in our daily lives.

De Lancey's experience shows in his masterly portrayal of Hamm - he maintains a teetering balance between cruelty and cunning, mental acuity and physical incapacity, hope and hopelessness, throughout the play.

Collins, who has excelled in all his diverse roles this season, succeeds in portraying Clov not as a victim, but as an active participant, who gives as much as he gets in the game unfolding on stage. *Endgame* is definitely worth seeing. It'll blow your socks off! I can't wait for the next play and the next