

A Doll's House

By Henrik Ibsen, in a version by Christopher Hampton

The Court Theatre

October 12 – November 9 2024

A Doll's House shocked theatre audiences when Henrik Ibsen's play was produced in 1879. Depicting the unravelling of a seemingly happy marriage the heroine, Nora, famously slams the door behind her as she leaves her family in an attempt to find herself and her place in the world.

With this play Ibsen introduced realism into theatre, tackling social problems of the day in the plays he wrote. *A Doll's House* is a classic of this genre and The Court Theatre's production reinforces how important issues of opportunity for women remain in our era when women seemingly have equality but the abuse of them is rife.

Acushla-Tara Kupe and Jonathan Price set the scene as Nora and Torvald enact their claustrophobic relationship. She is his treasured possession, his little dove, she is to be protected from the world she can't understand. She flutters and flirts, acquiescing, at least outwardly, to his demands.

Kupe gives a commanding performance as a thoughtless, featherbrained woman particularly when contrasted with her widowed friend. Hester Ulyart is outstanding as Christine, who along with Anne-Marie the nanny, creates a counterpoint to Nora. They demonstrate the harsh realities of life for luckless women of their time.

As the play progresses reality begins to impress itself on Nora, the implications of a well-intentioned but illegal act she committed years previously threatening to destroy her world. The giddy, thoughtless manner of the first scene changes to anxiety, then panic, then ultimately to strength as she accurately assesses her position and determines to begin life anew.

It is a demanding role and Kupe works totally believably through Nora's changes from pampered plaything to a woman of determination. All the cast, including Roy Snow, Kim Garrett, Cameron Douglas, Jorja Baylee and the three delightful children, ably back her up.

The production that director Melanie Luckman has created is remarkable. The actors keep the audience captivated as the story unfolds. Costuming, based on Norwegian fashion from the time is superbly detailed. The set is magnificent. The C19th middle-class drawing room is complete with Arts and Crafts detailing, and mother and child paintings hint at the relationships about to be destroyed. The cut away ceiling adds a brilliant flourish.

Anterooms have also been furnished adding to the impression of realism as characters come and go in the house. The set designer, Julian Southgate and workshop and props teams deserve applause. The lighting too is impressive, giving a clear sense of time as the play progresses.

A quibble; at times the use of a strong kiwi accent didn't fit comfortably amongst the strongly real nineteenth century ambience.

A Doll's House was produced in the early days of The Court Theatre in the Begg's Theatrette as the company was looking for a permanent home. Now as The Court Theatre's post-earthquake home is in sight this production marks the final play to be performed in the Addington Shed. It is an excellent choice to mark this occasion.