

End of Summer Time

By Sir Roger Hall

The Court Theatre

21 June – 16 August 2025

Review by Robyn Peers

It was Ross Gumbley's night, alright. For eighty minutes he held a packed audience enthralled as he related the next chapter in the life of that good kiwi bloke, retired cow cocky Dickie Hart. I had not met Dickie before, which didn't detract from the story, but now I am keen to see the two earlier plays.

The move to a stylish apartment on Auckland's North Shore has come as a shock to Dickie. There's nowhere to potter, no tool shed, nowhere to grow vegetables. What is a man to do? We watch enthralled as he navigates his new life, getting to know the neighbours, traversing the motorways of the big city, entertaining the grandchildren, trying to find meaning in his transplanted environment.

This dislocation of occupation, if not environment will be familiar to many. Glenda, Dickie's wife, seen only through his dialogue, is busy. She has her book group, exercise classes, indoor plants, housework and meals to prepare. It's only Dickie who is all at sea.

Dickie is curmudgeonly, a spot sexist and racist, anti-academic, anti-woke and avowedly pro-rugby. His prejudices and proclivities provide great entertainment for an audience who has clearly met his type before. His crafty alliance with his vegan grandchildren by introducing them to fast food gains an appreciative laugh.

Gumbley presents his character hugely sympathetically. We may not agree with many of his attitudes, but we feel for him as he makes his way in the society he has ended up in. It is a virtuoso performance, outrageous but engaging.

And then COVID hits and his world falls apart. We will him to rise through his depression, to return to the splendid character of the beginning of the show.

All aspects of this production are superb. Whether baffled, elated or depressed, Gumbley manipulates our emotions with aplomb, enhanced by the deft direction of Dan Bain. The subtle sound design by Andrew Todd and clever lighting add depth to the narrative. There are snatches of a rugby crowd, the tapping of computer keys and music and dimmed lighting for the COVID transition, this is a team working together to enmesh us in the story.

Harold Moot's set design not only conjures up the contemporary kitchen, which doubtless sold the apartment to Glenda, but it works. Dickie drinks the coffee he has made, rinses the cup and eats his hot buttered toast. It is very real but one tiny, clever detail kept theatricality in view. The floorboarding, tightly wedged in the playing space, fragments as it extends toward the audience, marking Dickie's disintegration as well as the boundary between audience and actor, the story and reality.

Roger Hall's monologue is a perfect complement to The Court Theatre's opening play, Bruce Mason's *The End of the Golden Weather*. There is just short of a century between these depictions of Takapuna Beach; Auckland is now much more developed, the people are more diverse, but the beach and the pleasure it brings remain the same. Dickie, like Mason's Boy, is aware of the crossroads he is traversing. His summer may be ending but we fervently hope his autumn will be fruitful.