

Mr & Mrs Macbeth of Heathcote Valley Rd
The Court Theatre 18 May – June 22

From the moment Mark Hadlow trips, cursing, onto the darkened stage, exuding energy and physicality, we know we are in for a treat. He is Tom Macbeth, a seasoned Shakespearean actor arriving backstage for a performance. And a performance we get; his wife Jo arrives, and we are treated to a command performance as he hams up his injuries to garner her sympathy.

Lara MacGregor, as Jo, proves a perfect foil to Hadlow's antics, she has seen it all before, and treats him firmly but with forbearance, as they explore the politics of their long-term relationship. This relationship is at the heart of the story, the performance of Macbeth secondary to the drama playing out in the dressing room. Tom, we discover, is really hurting, she is Lady Macbeth, he is the understudy to a young, handsome reality TV star. Tom's behaviour is a reaction to both his relegation and his wife's clear attraction to the younger man.

Mark McEntyre's open set focuses on the dressing room, demarcated by a metal frame, brightly lit, in the centre of an empty, darkened stage. The transparency of this central area creates back and side stages as needed and the downstage area a stage for the play within the play to be performed. This, combined with the ominous opening music, the soundscape, the closely focused lighting, and the costume design, creates a production which is highly effective.

MacGregor and Hadlow are two very experienced actors in a very engaging play. Written by Gregory Cooper, from a concept suggested by Mark Hadlow, it is a brilliant vehicle for both performers. The two play off each other and create a totally believable reality. We feel sympathy for each of them as Jo tries to drag success from disaster, both in Macbeth and in their marriage.

Mr and Mrs Macbeth is from a long tradition of backstage farces, but this is a comedy with heart, flawlessly acted. And additionally, you get an abbreviated version of Macbeth – it's well worth seeing.

Robyn Peers