

King Arthur (2009) by Lucy Nordberg ☆☆☆☆

King Arthur is a new work by Brighton-based writer Lucy Nordberg. The King faces a dilemma.

Low Down

The tale of King Arthur retold in an engaging fusion of tradition and modernity proves that there is nothing really new in politics, despite what our ever increasing number of democratic representatives may wish to argue.

Review

The leader faces a dilemma. How does he usher in a new age of reason, peace, prosperity and autonomy for his people whilst ensuring that his enemies don't undo all his good work following his period in power? Sounds familiar, doesn't it.

The traditional tale of King Arthur has been cleverly taken by Andy Corelli and related to more recent political machinations. There are clear parallels with the dichotomy King Arthur faces and that faced by Tony Blair as he led Britain into war with Iraq – the line from the play “from false belief a desperate weakness grows” just about sums it up for me. It doesn't end there either. The King entreats his knights to “take advice from our subjects rather than waste time inside this castle”, an allegory aimed foursquare at our own discredited legislatures no doubt. And all the while we have Breunor scheming and manipulating in the background, spinning like a top, duplicity personified. Anyone spring to mind on the current political scene that matches this description?

King Arthur determines that he will bestow power to his people whilst earmarking his troubled bastard son, Mordred, as his successor. Cue much muttering in the cabinet ranks and commencement of plotting and counter plotting by his enemies against the proposed reforms and consequent threat to their power base. Move over Gordon, your knights are revolting.

It's not all serious stuff though as there's a delightfully zany interlude as the cast don hoodies and baseball caps to act a play within a play, part of the towns peoples' tradition it

SIEGE PERILOUS

turns out. But where is the Arthurian equivalent of David Cameron when one of the hoodies needs hugging?

Back to the serious bit. The play blends classic iambic pentameter with more conventional dialogue with the pleasing effect that this creates being enhanced by Corelli's baroque score. Combative fencing and a general sense of tension adds to the atmosphere of this bold piece of theatre. There's a strong performance from the experienced Jim Byars as King Arthur, supported well by Anne Kane Howie as Morgan Le Fey and Steven McMahon as Mordred. The rest of the cast contribute nicely to the fast moving if sometimes rather over-complicated plot, although lines were too frequently swallowed in the actors' haste to convey them to the audience, in one case repeatedly and annoyingly so. But the pick of the bunch is Allan Scott-Douglas as the Machiavellian Breunor - a truly commanding performance and great stage presence.

The play is at full gallop as it reaches its climax, leaving the audience somewhat gasping for breath as they try to keep up. But with a bit of mental dexterity you can manage it and the acting is well worth the effort in so doing.

Tim Wilcock. "Fringe Review"
27 August 2009