



Awesome horror  
... John Trutwin  
as Edmond  
(rear) and  
Patrick Dickson  
as King Lear

**King Lear**  
Riverside Theatres  
Review



Director Mark Kilmurry is a master of interpreting Shakespeare with beautiful simplicity. His latest in-the-

round production of *King Lear* bears his signature style in a stripped-down show that clocks in at a swift 2 1/2 hours.

A soundscape of rain opens the epic journey. On a bare stage, with just a box as furnishing, the tragedy begins. The eight actors come together centre stage in silence. Their characters seem uncomfortable and unsure why they are there. The silence is broken as the loving relationship between King Lear (Patrick Dickson) and his youngest daughter, Cordelia (Ksenja Logos) comes bursting on to

the stage in a game of hide-and-seek. With appropriate disdain, his two other (older) daughters, Regan (Vanessa Downing) and Goneril (Toni Scanlan) stand aside, looking on.

With that, the relationships are established. The silent individuals are given context and we prepare to observe as Lear's power is stripped away by those closest to him.

This is a drastically cut back version. Sometimes the brevity works and sometimes it doesn't.

Kilmurry's trademark simplicity and his severe abridging of the text can be distracting. At other times, his approach delivers the full force of the tragedy with great impact.

In one sense the production loses an epic quality, the lack of which sits uncomfortably with the final moments of Lear's tragic fall. Such economy of scale, with the removal of the characters Albany and Cornwall

(husbands of Lear's elder daughters in the unabridged version), as well as other severe cuts, all serve to make Lear's story less empathetic.

However, moments such as when the illegitimate Edmond (John Trutwin) is complicit in the blinding of Gloucester (Danny Mitchell), give this lean production an awesome horror.

It is the clarity of staging, design and performance which makes this a delight to watch.

Kilmurry's seamless scene changes, sound design and scenographic skill are breathtaking. He has an eye for strong imagery and you grasp that the fall of Lear is mirrored in all the characters. The play, as Edmond says, "comes full circle".

□ *Cnr Church and Market Sts, Parramatta. Until July 28, various times, \$27-\$50, 8839 3399, riversideparramatta.com.au*

**NICHOLAS PICKARD**