

# Theatre reviews

## *The Dresser*

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OP THEATRE CRITIC

Metro Theatre Centre  
Until February 9  
For tickets call (604) 266-7191

*The Dresser* is a prime example of how a good script can carry bad performances.

In the depths of World War II, a repertory Shakespearean troupe tours England, presenting the bard's masterpieces amidst warning sirens and air raids. Norman (Paul Kloegman) has been the personal dresser of the lead actor,

"Sir" (John Hedgecock), for sixteen years. One particularly frightening night, Sir disappears before a performance of *King Lear*. He returns seemingly mentally unbalanced and refuses to do the show. It is Norman's job to coax Sir into make-up, costume, and eventually onto the stage.

Playwright Ronald Harwood worked as a dresser for one of the last touring companies in England before becoming a writer. His personal experiences shine through in the script. He tells of a different kind of war, the war that emerges when art and reality struggle to co-exist.

The theatre is his battleground and his victims are the company members who portray many roles within the troupe.

Harwood's male characters take centre stage and are definitely the driving force of the play. The men are well-rounded and interesting, adding colour and life to the story. Kloegman plays a wonderfully energetic Norman. Hedgecock's performance is a little muddled, sometimes bright and intriguing, other times tedious.

Joining Norman and Sir are Oxenbury (Neil Schell), a middle aged actor bitter with his lowly

position in the company, and Geoffrey (Harry Seddon), a quiet, older gentleman who is just happy to be a part of something larger than himself. Seddon, who only appears twice, surprisingly provides the most beautiful performance of the play. After *King Lear* is over he pops into Sir's dressing room and shares a beer before going home. He talks briefly of his life in the theatre, and his gentleness and honesty creates a beautiful moment of theatre.

Where *The Dresser* really shows weaknesses is in the female roles. There isn't much to

work with; the women are under-developed and serve mostly as filler for the backstory of Sir. His mistress, Her Ladyship (Rosalyn Winther), appears only to explain the drudgery of touring life. Then there is Madge (Patricia Burns), the tough-talking stage manager who not-so-secretly has been in love with Sir for twenty years, and Irene (Christine Iannetta), the youngest addition to the troupe who attempts to sleep her way up to better roles. Add to these rather empty characters and three mediocre performances, and you have a big hole in an otherwise charming play.