

# The Bunyip Aristocrats



## Stage Whispers

Henry Hobbes is an ageing and pompous former judge whose irritation with Australia led him to secede his onion farm to create his personal micro-nation, 'The Kingdom of Hobbes'. He summons his two estranged children to his court, who turn up at the 'border' to discover what he wants from them, and to see what they can get from their father.

The daughter Hetty (aka Princess Hetty, Princess Henrietta) is played with fervour by Nicola Grant, her 'secret' not so well-hidden, though officially known only by her brother Hal (Henry, Prince Henry), ably played by David Arcidiaco. The sibling twins quickly regress to their childhood squabbings, with Grant and Arcidiaco convincing in their portrayal of that love-hate relationship you have with your brother or sister.

Mick Young is self-proclaimed King Henry, an original bogan in his plaid pyjama pants, a grumpy man and domineering father to his children. He clearly relishes this role in being rude and rambunctious when it comes to communicating with the twins and his assistant, Kenny.

And it's this character, the border guard, immigration official, court announcer, butler, policeman, and fellow resident of the Kingdom, that pulls all the threads together. Steven Nguyen is brilliant in this role that blossoms from naivety and grovelling to a man of power.

The plot turns like a screenplay for a short film – and definitely ends with the punchline of one – which is no surprise given writer Neale Irwin's AFTRS screen education, and it makes for a sharp script. Irwin's frugal words allow the performers to bring their characters to life in their mannerisms, their props, and their clothes (the twins' matching shirt and dress is a wonderful touch).

Those performers are given room to breathe life by director, James Harvy, but he doesn't allow any self-indulgence: the balance between the four performers is gently maintained, nudged from one corner to the next as the story is unwrapped. Alice Murphy's stage management retains momentum, with swift scene changes.

Beneath the huge amount of fun to be had in this hour, the themes are thinner: the role and purpose of family comes through strongest, though King Henry's almost incidental reference to colonisation is a gold nugget that should have been mined for more

The Green Guys Company presented the sold-out season of 'Parlour Games' at last year's Fringe, and this season's offering should be no-less successful. Long live the King!

*Mark Wickett — February 22, 2022*