

CUPIDITY AND CHICANERY

Dark, fast-paced comedy takes no prisoners

THE KINGMAKERS. Directed by Louis Viljoen, with Pierre Malherbe, Brendon Daniels and Rebecca Makin-Taylor. At the Alexander Upstairs Theatre, Tuesday to Saturday at 7pm until September 13. **STEYN DU TOIT** reviews.

THE important thing to remember here is that this is not a calamity. Most definitely not. A blindside? Sure. A temporary setback? Certainly. But not a calamity. As long as they can keep this in mind they will be all right. And the sooner they can find a new political puppet to send back into the battlefield, the sooner they can trade in their life rafts for yachts.

Written and directed by Louis Viljoen, *The Kingmakers* is a dark political comedy that opens immediately after two opposition party strategists unsuccessfully tried to

place a neutral party member in contention for leadership.

Blackballed and finding themselves on the outskirts of their party, Arlow (Pierre Malherbe) and Daniel (Brendon Daniels) then start hatching a brutal, bloodied counter-attack.

Enlisting the help of Amy (Rebecca Makin-Taylor), a spin doctor, their scheme involves finding a respected, yet “innocent” legislator. Someone still untainted by personal ambition. After secretly grooming this person and introducing him to the benefits of being friends with AmGold – a mining company looking to increase its footprint in the province – the trio hopes to eventually puppeteer their man into power. To make him king.

Viljoen’s fast-paced, expletive-laden script is careful not to name or implicate any real-life politicians or

organisations. However, the fact that the characters’ strategy involves the organisation of a miners strike, followed by the sending in of their politician to “mediate” between the workers and AmGold (a company covertly lining his pockets) is by no means a creative coincidence. Nor is the tragic event that’s about to occur when the plan lopsides.

That said, *The Kingmakers* isn’t an issue-driven play about specific events against the backdrop of our dismal sociopolitical landscape, but rather one that comments on deceit as being one of the building blocks of politics.

The sooner you realise that morality is an instinctive notion, the better a politician you’ll make. Because, at the end of the day, politics is about a) concocting a lie b) committing to preach that lie as gospel c) peddling said lie to the public and d) essentially making them collaborators in their own demise.

As a playwright, Viljoen (*Champ, The Frontiersmen*) isn’t afraid to kick off his shoes, roll up his pant legs and wade through ordure if need be.

He calls a spade a spade and is definitely not out to win friends and influence people. This allows for an uncompromising honesty to his work often lacking in local theatre.



UNDERHAND: Arlow (Pierre Malherbe), Amy (Rebecca Makin-Taylor) and Daniel (Brendon Daniels).

While you’ll leave *The Kingmakers* under no illusions as to his distrust of politicians, you’ll also leave aware of his genuine empathy for those they screw over daily in their self-serving pursuit of money and power.

“[The] selling of those [city zones] means to Jenny Breadwinner that the job she could walk to, the job that supported grandma apartheid survivor and little brother born-free, the job that was her ticket to middle-class glory, is harder to get to because she can’t live in her neighbourhood,” Daniels’ character observes at one point. He’s referring

to the gentrification and “improving” of their city through foreign capital at the (further) expense of the poor and the marginalized.

As the only character with any chance of getting into heaven one day, Daniel is played with confliction and nuance by Daniels.

The person he portrays is caught between greed and doing the right thing; between idealism and realism.

He remains one of our most prolific actors. A gifted, versatile performer, *The Kingmakers* is but the latest in his slew of successes these past few years – among them *Four*

Corners, Balbesit, Rooiland, Die Rolbalspeler and *Oorsee*.

After recently seeing Makin-Taylor tracking English-speaking South Africans across our 400-year colonial history (in *Expectant*) and getting down to Kanye West in a bar while wearing angel wings (*Last Rounds*), it’s great experiencing her this time around in a more ruthless setting and holding her own as a part of an ensemble.

Her stiletto-wearing character is cool, collected and without a doubt the most dangerous of them all.

Not as subtle, yet equally cut-throat, is Malherbe’s Arlow. He is

the knife people like Amy needs in order to cut bread. Obnoxious, Machiavellian and unapologetic, he plays a great baddie and makes for the perfect vehicle through which Viljoen can showcase his God-given talent for weaving together profanities into disgustingly linguistic, near lyrical executions.

Full of cupidity, chicanery, underhandedness and unscrupulous behaviour, *The Kingmakers* slips its way through it all and takes no prisoners along the way.

● Tickets are R90 to R100. To book, see www.alexanderbar.co.za or call 021 300 1652.

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