

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

Pressure

David Haig

Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham

6–10 March 2018

The odd couple of hiccups did not in any way mar what an utterly stupendous performance this was.

Much of Europe had been for four years under occupation by the Axis powers and Operation Overlord was the code name for the Allies campaign to liberate Western Europe. Involving over three million service personnel, it all hinged on the weather if the Normandy Landings on D-Day were to be “a go”.

The play’s opening action, in Southwick House in Portsmouth—the HQ of the allied expeditionary force—starts just days before the allied D Day landings are due to commence on 5 June 1944. The weather is sunny and swelteringly hot. But will it stay this way? Is weather prediction a science or an art?

Colonel Irving P Krick, Eisenhower’s fellow American meteorological adviser, who has never got it wrong, excellently played by Philip Cairns, believes it will be based on similar weather patterns from past years and disbelieves the existence of the jet stream.

However, Group Captain James Stagg (David Haig), chief meteorological adviser to the supreme commander of the allied forces in Europe, doesn’t think it will. He cannot say for certain as anything more than 24 hours is a guess, an educated guess from information and figures, but a guess all the same.

David Haig gives an impressive performance of this proud Scot, reeling off atmospheric data like a true scientist, debating the barographs, isobars, jet stream and doing his utmost to convince General Eisenhower that the weather would throw its damndest at the aircraft, ships and landing craft on the 5 June. His inner turmoil, over his wife in hospital giving birth to their second son, is handled brilliantly.

Malcolm Sinclair cuts an impressive and forceful General Eisenhower, capturing the burdens of the task before him, the decisions he has to take responsibility for and the men whose lives may be lost because of those decisions. Laura Rogers is superb as the very British Lieutenant Kay Summersby, Eisenhower’s chauffeur and confidante, giving just the right touch as a young woman in love, though which we later learn is unrequited.

Michael Mackenzie is just hilarious as the electrician in charge of additional phones and deftly switches from that role to Admiral Ramsey.

Colin Richmond’s otherwise simple and very effective set has huge synoptic weather charts which are changed throughout the performance as the reports come in from the meteorological station.

It was good to see such a large cast on tour, and what a superb cast they are for this very entertaining and informative factually based production expertly written by David Haig.

Definitely one to get tickets for, if you haven't already booked to see it.

Reviewer: [Judith Wordsworth](#)