

Power play of epic proportions

KINGS OF WAR

Adelaide Festival

Theatre

Festival Theatre

Until March 13

BINGE watching Shakespeare is as addictive as a Netflix drama in the inventive hands of Toneelgroep Amsterdam.

Kings of War turns *Henry V*, *Henry VI* and, after interval, *Richard III* into a generational epic on the qualities of leadership that will leave you hungrily pressing play for the next instalment.

In fact, so much of the action is filmed in close-up by a roving cameraman that there is a danger of simply watching the giant video screen, instead of the rousing performances on stage.

Behind and to the sides of this – hidden from the audience's view – are the real corridors of power. Cameras follow the players through this backstage maze when they exit the main set, in scenes reminiscent of *The West Wing*'s walking hallway conversations.

Here is where many of the three plays' doublecrosses and the production's visual surprises take place.

At first, an ominous hum fills the auditorium as the screen flashes back through English monarchs – past and possibly future – to a brief recap of the “previous episode” with the death of Henry IV.

A four-piece brass section appears to perform an equally foreboding fanfare for *Henry*

V, played with charismatic assuredness by Ramsey Nasr, who quickly strikes to also claim the throne of France.

His teleconference conversations with the French Dauphin's messenger and rousing TV address are highlights, as is the clever underscoring of many monologues with live vocal performances.

Against all odds, Henry V wins his battle – played out with the aid of video graphics – only to die of dysentery, leaving behind an infant son.

Thus it segues into *Henry VI*, with the Duke of Gloucester acting as Regent and friend to the young king,

until he comes of age. Eelco Smits transforms himself from guileless child into puppet monarch, leading into a tale of betrayal and intrigue. By the time he finds his feet the crown has been snatched by York, who becomes Edward IV.

However, it is Hans Kesting's initially understated performance as *Richard III* that proves utterly captivating.

Forgoing the usual Quasimodo-like hunch and gait, Kesting's Richard has a more lumbering lurch, his deformity characterised by the port-wine birthmark on his face. Only when he is isolated in his bunker, does this Richard's inner monstrosity manifest itself outwardly in Kesting's mad, mocking romp of the character's usual physical clichés.

It even ends in the

theatrical equivalent of a Marvel movie post-credits teaser in a scene from *Henry VII* which hints at things to come, with aspirations of welfare, prosperity and even peace. - PATRICK MCDONALD



CHARISMA: Ramsey Nasr is crowned as Henry V in *Kings of War*.

Picture: Tony Lewis