

## COMPANY STATEMENT

3 May 2023

### Bell Shakespeare response to Cameron Woodhead

We have broad shoulders at Bell Shakespeare. As a theatre company, we want audiences to enjoy our productions. When they don't, we accept our creative differences and move on.

The Age's theatre critic, Cameron Woodhead, didn't like our current production of *Macbeth* ([1 May edition](#)). That's his prerogative; many critics have provided favourable reviews of this production and *Macbeth* means many things to many people. One of the joys of seeing Shakespeare's works is to debate them afterwards.

This time though, we must call out conduct which, in our view, was cruel and unfair.

Cameron's targeting of the lead actor, Hazem Shammas was, in our view, belittling and contemptuous. The lampooning included language such as, "Monty Python's Hospital for Over-Acting", "By interval you half expect a nurse with chloroform to come in", "Shammas leaves himself nowhere to turn that isn't stalked by the inappropriate silhouette of the clown", and so on. Whether it be the actor's manner of vocal delivery, his physical appearance ("vein popping excess") and even his restraint, all were held up for ridicule.

Whilst Cameron may have issues with the production, we do not consider a response should ever be draped in language like this.

In our view, no actor deserves to be dismissed so personally in a theatre review.

Hazem Shammas is a Logie winning Palestinian born actor for whom *Macbeth* is particularly resonant. "Macbeth is driven by something that finally breaks him," he has said. "And that story became my Dad's story in terms of coming to this land and then pursuing his dreams at all costs, in terms of the costs to himself and breaking the hearts of the ones he left behind." (Credit: *ABC radio Melbourne*, 29 April 2023)

Actors don't have a voice when critics write negative things about them. It has long been thus. However, the stage is their workplace. And they are entitled to a safe space at work just as much as anyone.

Accordingly, in our view, Cameron's decision to use such language crossed a line.

*Ends*