

going out | stars | puzzles | history

Tbreak

Some things never change in politics, writes **Xanthe Kleinig**

Life's always been a little lonely at the top

KEVIN Rudd's political opponents complained our former PM's style was too autocratic to keep the top job. Ironically, the same criticism was levelled at colonial governor Lachlan Macquarie.

The parallels with modern politics have astounded the cast and crew of a new production of Alex Buzo's play *Macquarie*, opening this week as part of the celebrations for the bicentenary of Macquarie's leadership.

Actress Megan Drury, who plays Macquarie's wife Elizabeth, says the power couple had to stare down their detractors during a fast-paced decade that laid the foundations for modern Australia.

"He met with a lot of opposition to the way he wanted to build the city and the nation," she says.

"People felt he was a little bit of an autocrat. I understand the Labor Party, or certain members of the Labor Party, felt that

about Rudd, and that's something that Julia Gillard has said, that she's going to take a more consultative approach."

But while Rudd's critics say he wasted his chance in the top job, it was the pace of change that riled Macquarie's opponents.

Macquarie chose the disgraced Francis Greenway to serve as the colony's chief architect and insisted on giving convicts in general a fair go.

"There were a number of notable members of the community, and certainly the colonial office, who really did their best to get Macquarie out of there because they didn't agree with his 'liberal' policies," Drury says.

Her acting credits include Company B's *Ruben Guthrie* and the role of Claudia Campanelli, King's Cross detective and sexual assault victim in the *Underbelly* series. To play Elizabeth, arguably Australia's original first lady, she has pored over the history books,

drawing on Elizabeth's own journals, available online through Macquarie University.

"She was socially and politically savvy. She was very good at people-handling where Lachlan was a little bit erratic and very, very military in his approach to people he was working with," she says.

The 1971 script has been reworked from the original with the approval of Emma Buzo and the Alex Buzo company, which is dedicated to maintaining the late playwright's estate for a contemporary audience.

"There are other things going on in the play as well that for any Australian history aficionado, they will be surprising," Drury says.

"They have taken a couple of liberties with a bit of the story."

Macquarie, Riverside Theatres, cnr Church and Market Sts, Parramatta; tomorrow 7.30pm, until July 31, 8839 3399, riversideparramatta.com.au

Power play:
Megan Drury
with fellow
cast
members
Graham
Harvey (left)
and Jack
Campbell

