

REVIEW: 'RICHARD III' A NIGHT OF THEATRICAL MAGIC

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By James Trainor

Richard III is one of the most notorious villains in the history of drama, the history of literature and the history of... well, history. When he's not seducing widows and imprisoning young boys, he's climbing his way to the throne of England, stepping on his own kinsman in the process. He's corrupt and capricious, vile and violent, a misshapen monster without an ounce of pity in his twisted body.

Yet, as we are reminded by actor Dennis Fox in the lead role of Riverside Theatre's production of "Richard III," we love him. We can't take our eyes off of him. Though he's as devious as the crafty Queen Elizabeth (Dawn Michelle Mancarella) and as vengeful as the hot-headed Hastings (Patrick DuLaney), we often find ourselves in Richard's corner. He's charming, he's ingratiating. He's just *fun*.

Like any good politician, Richard is a natural showman. He knows how to play a crowd. He knows how to turn someone's words against them. He also knows how to make a scene, a metaphor that carries throughout the play. Richard is an incredible actor, and in each scene he takes on a different role, doing whatever it takes to get the crown. It's mesmerizing to watch. With each successive gambit he grows more audacious, and the audience is along for the ride.

These Machiavellian manipulations require an energetic and versatile actor. Fox does not disappoint here. He plays the role with characteristic charm, wooing the audience with his wicked schemes. He is an expert with text, keeping time with the manic pace of the play like a well-wound clock. He regularly turns to the audience, telling us what's going to happen next. When he does this, he comes alive, and so do Shakespeare's words. We're transported to London, and are willing accomplices in the War of the Roses.

Though the political intrigue is exciting, and at times comical, none of this is without consequence. Throughout the play, curses are spoken, flowery promises are broken and God's vengeance is invoked. Prophecy after prophecy tells us just how bad things will get for England before they get better. Our words, Shakespeare tells us, are not mere

air; they carry our soul's breath with them, and the consequences of speaking lightly can be dire.

Queen Margaret (Saren Nofs-Snyder), widow of Henry VI (head of the defeated Lancaster faction) is one of the characters deepest in bloodshed. Throughout the rest of the Henry VI cycle ("Richard III" is the fourth part of a series chronicling the War of the Roses) she plays the role of scourge. She seems to be the moral center of this play, however; as the body count rises, we are reminded again and again of "Margaret's curse." During the moments where the play slows down and grows reflective, Nofs-Snyder is very honest, very human and quite sympathetic. When she is onstage, as with the few truly innocent characters (Clarence and the young heirs of Edward IV come to mind), we are reminded of the scale of bloodshed, not just in this play but throughout history.

Director Kristen Horton sets this play in a film noir style, which fits the brutality and dark humor of her vision. The costumes, designed by Colleen Combs McConegle, and the lighting, designed by Paul Sannerud, complement the themes of the play well (though it is a bit distracting that Elizabeth isn't wearing black after her husband dies).

The set is simple and practical; the playing area itself is the star at times. The space is ideal for Shakespeare, Riverside's artistic leadership recognizes, and returning to Lower City Park after last year's flooding is a triumph. We can watch the action unfold on stage as the sun sets around us, gaze up at the stars during intermission, and watch the actors work their magic under the lights in the second half. The atmosphere is what transforms "Richard III" from a well-written, well-performed play to a night of theatrical magic. It's a great choice for Riverside's tenth annual Shakespeare Festival, and the energy and talent of the cast will keep you on the edge of your seat.

"Richard III" runs in rotation with "A Midsummer Night's Dream" through July 10 as part of the tenth annual Riverside Theatre Shakespeare Festival. [Click here](#) for schedule and ticket information.