

Slaying His Way to the Top: "Richard III," at Riverside Theatre's Festival Stage through July 10

Written by Emily Heninger
Tuesday, 23 June 2009 08:39

Review: Richard III



Theatergoers, be forewarned: *Richard III* is not for the faint of heart. Riverside Theatre's production of the Shakespearian play is not only packed with violence, death, and one of the freakiest kings in English history; it's also three hours long. But for those who choose to stick it out, this Iowa City show is well worth the time. Directed by Kristin Horton,

Richard III

packs a punch that may just leave you breathless.

Review: Richard III

One of Shakespeare's most favored history plays, *Richard III* follows the title character on his bloody path to the throne of England. Riverside's production sets the play in relatively modern times, equipping the cast with guns rather than swords, and Richard with a lame left side instead of a hunchback. The story, however, remains the same. Mercilessly killing everyone in his way, including his own brother, wife, and nephews, Richard is a character that everyone loves to hate - and yet one who is also, somehow, irresistibly fascinating.

Dennis Fox, as Richard, brought the infamous king to life with his chilling performance during Saturday evening's show. From the play's opening monologue, when Fox immediately locked eyes with audience members, it was clear that Richard was a bit unhinged. Fox's nasal voice and halting limp added to his eerie character so that Richard almost seemed comic-book-villain material - but ten times more brutally ambitious than Lex Luthor. Portraying everything from sadistic amusement at his successful wooing of Lady Anne to hair-raising anger at the invasion of his rival Richmond's army, Fox played the entire range of Richard's complex personality with charisma and skill.



Steve Cardamone, as Richard's doomed brother, the Duke of Clarence, equally impressed me, particularly as he voiced his prophetic dream. His barely-controlled panic and fear were palpable as he described grotesque underwater visions of jewel-filled skulls. Only minutes later, as the real-life murderer dragged him offstage to be drowned, those emotions reappeared, this time as violent hysterics. With a final drawn-out scream of agony, Cardamone left me feeling shocked and unsettled, precisely as he should.

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In at least a couple of scenes, there's something to smile at in this dark show. Liam Kaboli and Kaleb Michel played the two young princes in line for the throne, capturing my heart with their snappy royal suits and mouths full of Shakespeare. Kaboli, in particular, as the young Prince Edward, showed potential for a future on the stage, projecting his words far beyond what you might expect from a sixth-grader. It's really too bad that Richard decided to murder them, too, or we might have enjoyed more from these two talented kids.

A few sound glitches during Saturday's performance distracted from the show at times, such as when a joyful fanfare began playing during the announcement of Clarence's death. And the unfortunate occurrence of a blown speaker post-intermission masked much of the dialogue during Richard's ghostly nightmare with a discordant buzzing noise. When it worked, though, the addition of haunting music usually highlighted scenes well, adding tension and a sense of foreboding.

However, whenever Queen Margaret, played by Saren Nofs-Snyder, appeared accompanied by music, it was almost *too* obvious that someone was about to kick the bucket. Her first appearance as the banished queen was certainly sinister, and Nofs-Snyder, with her strong voice and threatening persona, did a great job of creating a powerful character. And yet, her continued silent reappearances seemed a somewhat unnecessary bit of direction, particularly since Margaret is frequently referred to in the spoken lines anyway. Fewer appearances and more subtle references may have heightened the prophetic queen's aura of mystery.



One of the neatest parts about Riverside's productions during their annual Shakespeare Festival is the combination of young talent with more seasoned actors. Even disregarding the two young princes, *Richard III* was awash with youth: college students and twenty-somethings bursting with energy added their vigor to the mix, while theatrical veterans provided a foundation of hard-earned talent to support the show. Interns act side-by-side with New Yorkers and Chicagoans who have long established themselves in the world of theatre. The combination is refreshing and exciting; it's a glimpse of an actor's journey.

By the end of the show, however, I was more than a little relieved to see Richard fall, spouting his eternal last words, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"... *finally*. Three hours of watching Richard murder and manipulate

is
a long time. But ultimately, Riverside's

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Richard III
was three hours well spent.

For tickets and information, call (319)388-7672 or visit RiversideTheatre.org .