

## “Richard III” Reviews



No play in the Shakespearean canon is as dependent on the gifts of the actor playing the title role [as “Richard III”]. Granted, a terrific Polonius won't entirely make up for a weak Hamlet. But no one walks away from a miscast production of "Richard III" saying, "But at least Clarence was pretty good!"

**Richard is the show — and in director Belinda Bremner's staging for Oak Park Festival Theatre, Kevin Theis knows it. His conniving Richard takes palpable glee in his machinations, and fully expects his audience to conspire in his joyous villainy.**

Moral amnesia is the default position for everyone in this play, and what makes Theis' Richard so engaging is that he alone cops to his crimes, often with a sly winking leer. After his seduction of Lady Anne (Jhenai Mootz), Theis recounts how he killed her husband, Edward, the former Prince of Wales, "stabbed in my angry mood at Tewksbury." Theis delivers the line with the same kind of offhanded resignation we might use to recount an argument over a parking space.

**"Richard III" succeeds mostly as a satisfying, if not transcendent, showcase for Theis.**

- Kerry Reid



**Kevin Theis plays the bad-armed, humped-back and shortfooted Duke/King (Richard III) as a charming—even charismatic persona with whom from the opening soliloquy we become lured into a partnership of evil.**

We are enticed by Theis' sly performance as Richard even when he outlines his evil plan in a monologue that gets us to almost like this charming but purely evil villain. His asides to the audiences with their wink and sour faces keep us intoxicated with Richard's manipulations leading to killings that lead to his ascending to the English crown.

The action is furious; the acting outstanding; **and the strong, nuanced and emotionally drenching performance by Kevin Theis as Richard** makes this outdoor production worth packing a picnic basket and lugging lawn chairs to the beautiful Austin Gardens in Oak Park for food and some fine Shakespeare.

-Tom Williams

W E D N E S D A Y  
**JOURNAL**  
*of Oak Park and River Forest*

Fortunately, director Belinda Bremner has a clue and actor Kevin Theis has a gift. And because "Richard III" is, in many respects, a one-man show, that was all we needed for an extraordinary evening. I have never "heard," or been more involved in, a Shakespearean production like I was with this one, which enables me to say something I never thought I would ever write: **This performance of Richard III is better than Chicago Shakespeare's.**

**This is electric. I've always admired his acting, but here he rises to another level altogether. He specializes in playing characters with a pronounced dark side, and there is no character in the entire Shakespearean canon whose dark side is quite so pronounced.** Richard, Duke of Gloucester, is as honest as he is ruthless, an unapologetic villain, who quickly co-opts the audience by taking them into his confidence.

In our world, villains are carefully disguised, camouflaged, coiffed, airbrushed, test-marketed and meticulously managed, so Richard III comes off as refreshingly honest. **And Kevin Theis brings this fascinating character fully alive.**



With all due respect to Iago, Richard Gloucester is the greatest villain Shakespeare ever penned. The "lump of foul deformity" at the raging, bitter heart of Richard III is fascinatingly complex, a monster who knows he's a monster and embraces his own murderous ruthlessness like a child hugging a new puppy on Christmas morning. He is also undeniably, irresistibly charming.

With Oak Park Festival Theatre's staging of the blood-soaked classic, director Belinda Bremner has the capable Kevin Theis in the title role. It's clear from the start that **the actor has a fine command of Richard's two-faced personality.** After successfully wooing the widowed Lady Anne over the corpse of her dead father, Richard gleefully ponders his powers of manipulation. "Was ever woman in this humor wooed?" he asks incredulously, and then, even more so: "Was ever woman in this humor won?" **Theis sinks his fangs into the line as if he were relishing the first bite of a bloody steak.**

Theis is equally deft hurling insults; there's an unmistakable glee in his voice as he denounces the deposed Queen Margaret as "hateful, withered hag," and it's nigh on impossible not to take some delight in the withering put-down.

- Catey Sullivan



It must be fun to play the deformed, scheming title character of Shakespeare's longest history play. Kevin Theis certainly seems to relish the role in this staging by Oak Park Festival Theatre, and he draws the audience in with his capable, well-paced performance. Even abridged, it's a long show at two and a half hours, and it loses some steam after the first act, as Theis has fewer opportunities for the audience asides he does so well.

– Keith Griffith



**Recommended- a "Must See" Show**

The 2012 presidential election is shaping up to be a vicious, no-holds-barred conflict that could leave our country in shambles. But hey, at least it's not the War of the Roses. This summer's outdoor Shakespeare at Oak Park stars **Kevin Theis as Richard, the scheming, murdering, seducing slimeball who makes his way through several members of his own family to get to the throne. Critics say that although this period-dress production offers few surprises, Theis delivers the villainous goods.**



Kevin Theis, a skilled actor who has appeared onstage numerous times for Oak Park Festival Theatre since 1990, **puts his considerable talents to the test in the title role and captures his villainous character's manipulative personality in all its complexity.**