

**AussieTheatre.Com review by Bobbi-Lea Dionysius**

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## **The Tragedy of King Richard III**



Pacharo Mzembe and Todd MacDonald in *The Tragedy of King Richard III* – La Boite. Image Supplied.

If you think you've seen every possible interpretation of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, you will be delighted by La Boite's premiere production showing at the Roundhouse Theatre. Calling a 400 year-old production a premiere is a bold statement. It's not the prose you studied in high-school, but a whole new play. This is NOT Shakespeare – and that's a good thing.

This bold, bloody, thrilling adaptation was co-written by Marcel Dorney (winner Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2010/2011) and Daniel Evans (winner – Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2014/2015), inspired by the recent true event in 2012 when King Richard's actual remains were found in a car park in the UK city of Leicester, the former battle ground of Bosworth Field that ended his short two year rule.

Part Shakespeare, part Epic Theatre, *The Tragedy of King Richard III* is more like a dramatised analysis of Shakespeare's most notorious villain, excavating the man, the myth, and Shakespeare's take on it.

In the second half of the zippy, gloriously bloody 90-minute play (sans interval), the spotlight turns on Shakespeare himself (played masterfully by La Boite's artistic Director, Todd McDonald).

This show not only asks how you to rethink history from a new perspective, but relentlessly demands your involvement. It is a play that displays what I imagine would be the deliberations of a dramaturg (here, the genius of Lucas Stibbard in collaboration with the brilliant minds of Dorney and Evans), put onto the stage and inviting the audience to be part of the round table conversation.



Helen Howard. Image Supplied.

Particularly potent was Helen Howard's blood soaked full- bodied powerhouse speech about the traditional role of women (or lack thereof) in Shakespeare's plays.

Naomi Price held the stage as the narrator (she also played some minor characters), provoking us to question what we know about history and our role in creating that 'truth'. Director Daniel Evans also cleverly found some moments to show of Price's stunning singing voice, bringing in some modern musical references.

14 year-old Atticus Robb played the young Richard III with impressive maturity and reminded me of a young Leonardo DiCaprio. Hopefully he will be one of the nurtured in years to come for he certainly has a promising future treading the boards.

Amy Ingram, as expected, delivered an assured performance – bold, seductive, and cheeky all at once. Pacharo Mzembe also rounding out the stellar cast with a solid performance and great execution of the fight scenes (choreographed by Nigel Poulton).



Todd Macdonald as Shakespeare.

Image Supplied.

But it was Todd Macdonald's frenetic workshopping of Shakespeare's play that was the highlight of the show. It was like a reality game show, in which he was buzzed every time the powers that be didn't like an idea. Not sure whether he would have been voted off the island or had his head chopped off, but the frenzied delivery allowed Macdonald's comedic talents (and personality) to shine through.

The set was simple but dramatic (designed by Kieran Swann). In the centre of the round theatre was a raised square stage that filled with water, blood, and rain throughout the show – sparing no actor. The lighting design (Jason Glenwright), made great use of the water effects to paint the foreboding atmosphere. But with the mixture of rope lights around the stage and a grid of lights above with water pouring down, I did have a moment where I thought “I hope they did a good health and safety plan and don't electrocute themselves”. Thrilling stuff.

In *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, La Boite presents a new genre of theatre and offers a platform from which to jump start conversations around Shakespeare in High Schools – I hope it has a very successful touring run.

However, the only criticism is that the cerebral depth the 90-minute play (no interval) delved into was a little hard (or a little too much) to follow at times.