



Shakespeare's *Richard III*

by Jennifer Fordyce

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Melora Marshall and Abby Craden in *Richard III*

Photo by Ian Flanders

As venues across Los Angeles competed for business this past Independence Day Weekend, the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum gave it a go with their production of Shakespeare's *Richard III* which brought it in a modest-sized crowd full of family and friends of the cast members, young couples and elderly patrons. For some patrons, Shakespeare's plays can be a daunting and rather disorienting experience if one has not been given the opportunity to at least read the synopsis of the play before hand. And the lesser-known *Richard III* is one that will leave you swimming in characters if you are not prepared for it.

Melora Marshall, who has been part of the Theatricum since its inception, gave a splendid performance as Richard III under the direction of Ellen Geer on Sunday night. Yet having a woman actor alternating as the lead male character of the play did not help in the comprehension of such a character-dense production as *Richard III*. The decadent costumes by Perry Bret Ash were beautiful and authentic looking, but the costumes failed to define the various allegiances (from King Edward IV to the followers of Richmond to the followers of Richard III) of the characters of the play.

"There are many characters [in Shakespeare's *Richard III*]," said one theatre patron when asked about the performance. "But it is so beautiful here," she continued. And beautiful the Theatricum Botanicum is with its spacious garden and picnic area. However, even in the mist of such beauty, the hard-cement outdoor amphitheater seating becomes torturous even with the addition of a slim matted cushion to rest upon for a fee of \$1.00. It is best to bring the thickest cushion you can get away with along with a blanket as the refreshing night air in the rustic wooded Topanga hillside gets a bit chilly as the evening sets in.

Along with the *Richard III* production, the Theatricum is offering alternating performances of Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Moliere's *Tartuffe* (or *The Hypocrite*), *Rose Cottages* by Bill Bozzone and *My Name is Rachel Corrie* from the writings of Rachel Corrie. In addition, the Theatricum is presenting a special *Take Note!* series which has featured performances by Marshall McDaniel and the Pescatori Trio and Lexi Pearl's *Momentum Place*. The next performance of the series is Inara George's *Tribute to Burt Bacharach and Hal David* taking place over Labor Day Weekend on Monday, September 5, 2011.

There is a lot going on over at the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum in Topanga and well worth the trip if one comes prepared for the elements. It is places like the Theatricum that keeps creative integrity alive and well in a city that challenges the values of each and every one of us.

"Richard III" continues through October 2nd, 2011 at the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum, 1419 N. Topanga Canyon Blvd., in Topanga. For reservations call (310)455-3723 or visit www.theatricum.com.