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## ***Richard III: Ruthless Revenge and Rivalry Reigns***



We know Richard III as a villain, but in reality, perhaps not as ruthless as depicted in Shakespeare's version of *Richard III*. We'll never know.

Misshapen in body, he was bitter, a brilliant, ruthless strategist and a silver-tongued manipulator of the human psyche. How else could he have won the hand of Lady Anne (Willow Geer) by wooing her over the bloody corpse of her husband whom Richard had

killed? His ambition to be king knew no bounds and Lady Anne would join the ghosts of those who died by Richard's hand.

Chad Jason Scheppner's Richard, Duke of Gloucester and younger brother to King Edward IV, was all that and more. From the opening soliloquy, "Now is the winter of our discontent . . .," Scheppner entreats the audience to become co-conspirators to his ghastly schemes and never lets them go.

The play takes place at the end of the War of the Roses (1455-1487 C.E.), a civil war between the houses of Lancaster and York for the English throne. England enjoys a period of peace under King Edward IV and the victorious York's But Richard resents Edward's power and the happiness of those around him and begins to aspire secretly to the throne. He decides to kill anyone he has to in order to become king.

The death of his son Clarence accelerates King Edward's death and Richard is named lord protector of England, in charge until the eldest of Edward's two sons grows up. Richard proceeds to kill noblemen who are loyal to the young princes, the kinsman of Queen Elizabeth, widow of the king, and finally, after sending the princes to the Tower, has them smothered in their beds.

Richard reigns for just two years until Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond (Andrew Ravani), invades England and Richard is killed in the Battle of Bosworth Field. Henry becomes Henry VII, marries Edward and Queen Elizabeth's daughter, Elizabeth, thus uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster and this starts the five generations of Tudors.

The ensemble cast creates the ambience for Richard's contemptible climb to King of England. William Dennis Hunt as the ailing King Edward IV turns in a noteworthy performance. Thad Geer as his middle son, Clarence, foolishly trusting, is executed on his brother's order. Queen Margaret (Ernestine Phillips), widow of King Henry VI and Edward's predecessor is a self-declared prophetess who rains curses on the House of York. Despite her hatred of Richard, Lady Anne (Willow Geer) becomes the helpless victim of his malevolent seduction. Queen Elizabeth (Abby Craden) is the bereft widow of Edward IV whose sons Richard has had smothered in their beds. Melora Marshall as the Duchess of York, mother to King Edward, Clarence and Richard, brings her curses down upon the head of her youngest son. Marshall alternates in the role of Richard with Scheppner. Christopher W. Jones portrays an interesting Duke of Buckingham, Richard's right-hand man who is almost as amoral and ambitious as Richard himself is, and wisely takes his leave of the king, when the tide turns against him.