

Alan Committie as Richard III turns in a tour de force at Maynardville

By [John Cooper](#)

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"Now is the winter of our discontent/Made glorious summer by this sun of York."

Well-known lines commence Shakespeare's offering for 2019 at the Maynardville Open-Air Theatre. Uttered by Alan Committie, as the eponymous Richard III, as he limps and crabs in fascist black to the front of the stage, more confiding with than simply addressing the packed-house audience last Wednesday. Right from the start, he had us and we watched and listened as he schemed and murdered – "off with his head!" – his way to the crown of England, leaving a trail of dead brothers and nobles in his wake.



Alan Committie and Lee-Ann van Rooi - © Jesse Kramer

A sinister role

Although he is a well-known stand-up comedian, Committie is a trained dramatic actor – and it shows. Surely this where his asides, smirks and grins to the audience, reminiscent of a true melodrama, come from. His repeated "I'm King" spoken with a mixture of surprise and glee, again directly to the audience, ends the first act.



Alan Committie and Tafara Nyatsanza - © Jesse Kramer

I remember hearing back in 2012 that an archaeological dig, in an English tarred car park of all places, had discovered Richard III's skeleton; which was later identified by genetic and other studies. The bones revealed that the King had scoliosis – curvature of the spine – and although one shoulder was likely higher than the other, he was no hunchback, had no sign of a withered arm and, quite likely, did not walk with a limp. With this recent knowledge, I had wondered how the play would be directed (well done here by Geoffrey Hyland). But the play stayed true to the playwright (and to probable Tudor false news). A good thing as the hunched gait of the villain king adds so much to the sinister role Committie plays.



Anthea Thompson - © Jesse Kramer

Strong supporting cast

Overall the supporting cast is a strong one. The four female roles are well acted; I particularly liked Anthea Thompson as Queen Margaret and Lee-Ann Rooi as the Duchess of York (Richard III's mother). Cassandra Mapanda as Queen

Elizabeth and Bianca Mannie as Lady Anne Neville (who Richard III woos and marries in the play) were also convincing.



Cassandra Mapanda and Lee-Ann van Rooi - © Jesse Kramer

The battle scene on Bosworth Field that brought the War of the Roses to an end is depicted on stage in the closing scenes by a sword fight between Richard III and the victorious Earl of Richmond, soon to become Henry VII – the first Tudor king. Richmond is well performed by Sanda Shandu, whose booming voice and erect stance play hero to Richard's III's villain. Earlier in the play, Shandu had, notably, played two other parts. This, at first, made identifying his successive characters a tad tricky; perhaps more obvious costume changes could have helped me here.

Simple sets set the scene

As always at Maynardville, the sets are simple – allowing the surrounding windswept trees to help set the scene. A collection of wooden pallets for steps, a wooden box for a throne and a wooden palisade were sufficient. However, I was struck, as we took our seats, by the stakes with impaled cloth heads at either side of the stage. Later in the play, the ghost of each person killed at Richard II's behest mournfully appears in succession and places their own cloth head on a waiting stake: scary stuff!



© Jesse Kramer

A great presentation

So once more, Maynardville Open-Air Theatre and William Shakespeare have failed to disappoint. A great presentation of one of the Bard's best. Maybe something a little lighter next year – a comedy would not go amiss: *Twelfth Night* anyone?

Directed by Geoffrey Hyland, with actors Alan Committie, Anthea Thompson, Lee-Ann van Rooi, Andrew Laubscher, Bianca Mannie, Cassandra Mapanda, John Maytham, David Viviers, Sanda Shandu and an ensemble of citizens and soldiers. Costume design: Ilka Louw. Set design: Geoffrey Hyland and Bridie Birdy. Lighting design: Faheem Bardien. Sound design: Bernard Kotze.



David Viviers and John Maytham - © Jesse Kramer

The programme comes with a handy insert depicting the genealogy of the play's character; worthy of a quick study before "curtain up".

Richard III will run at the Maynardville Open-Air Theatre in Wynberg, Monday to Saturdays until 9 March 2019 at 20.15pm. Tickets cost from R150 to R220.

Bookings can be made at Computicket on [0861 915 8000](tel:08619158000), online at www.computicket.com or at any Shoprite Checkers outlet.

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