

# Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

## First-Rate Plays Round Out Ashland Season

### OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY JUDGE DARLEEN ORTEGA



Two excellent productions round out the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's 11-play repertory for 2016, both Shakespeare plays that you will rarely have the opportunity to see, and provide contrasting takes on human vanity. You won't see Shakespeare done better than at OSF, and these two first-rate and imaginative productions feel especially definitive.

"Richard II" begins a series of Shakespeare's histories (the next

in the series, Henry IV, Parts I and II, will be performed at OSF next season) that can feel dense and hard to follow. A strength of this dazzling production is that Bill Rauch's direction, as well as the design and uniformly strong performances, beautifully reinforce themes that make the play feel more intuitively accessible. What emerges is a sense of a family drama, and of power being donned and performed without the neces-



PHOTO BY JENNY GRAHAM, OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Richard (Christopher Liam Moore, left) isn't quite ready to relinquish his crown to Henry Bullingbrook (Jeffrey King, right).



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Apemantus (Vilma Silva, center) scorns the flattery that Timon (Anthony Heald, right) receives from supposed friends like the painter (Sarah J. Brizek) and poet (Daniel T. Parker) who hope to entice him with their art.

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quite necessarily, propped him up. There is a scale to the production's design that conveys a sense of massive infrastructure around this king; at one point he appears wearing a cape that literally fills the room, and the richness and color of everything in sight feels intent on elevating this king to a stature beyond question. He is ruler by divine right, according to convention -- something he appears to have formed a habit of clinging to -- yet clearly a lot of human effort has been expended to emphasize the point.

The contradiction there, along with the stakes of this particular family's drama, infects everything. Christopher Moore as Richard exudes a sense of entitlement

that he believes because he must; it has literally been thrust upon him. Yet none of the considerable energy expended to support his reign has included the cultivation of inner authority, of any purpose deserving of designation as divine.

The play's action involves a murder plot and ensuing political intrigue that is eventually his undoing, but most interesting in this production is the sense that the tragedy is really a systemic one, that Richard, for all his flaws and self-absorption, was essentially set up for the failure that dooms him and that contains the seeds for conflicts that will trouble the generations that follow. In that

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sary grounding in true authority. The central character became a king in childhood, and has spent his life surrounded by family members and officers who have,

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