

The Australian Review by Martin Buzacott

May 32, 2016

La Boite's The Tragedy of King Richard III sets out to shock



Todd MacDonald and Pacharo Mzembe comes to blows in La Boite's *The Tragedy of King Richard III*. Picture: Dylan Evans

Calling all undergraduate theatre revolutionaries, does La Boite have a show for you.

Marcel Dorney and Daniel Evans's *The Tragedy of King Richard III* is a phantasmagoria of theatrical shock tactics of the kind made notorious two generations ago by Howard Barker and Peter Handke, and still beloved by screw-the-audience, change-the-world drama majors today.

Start with the obligatory fake blood, here not just routinely smeared all over the cast and set as in a normal act of theatrical juvenilia, but literally delivered in buckets, leaving the stage awash with the stuff. Nice one.

Then there's the opening, where Naomi Price, who comes to the theatre following appearances on a television singing contest, harangues the audience about their lack of understanding of several things, chief among which appear to be mobile phone technology and the construction of world history.

The set-up, she lectures us, has something to do with the rediscovery a couple of years ago of Richard III's remains in a Leicester car park. Anyway, cut to the chase and let's get on with the real business of blood and violence.

These are realised variously through assaults on women and children, innocent bystanders, and add in any other particularly shocking crimes that may have been missed, all given an added theatre games edge by the usual technique of the weaker the line, the louder it should be shouted.

Then there are the rambling program notes, filled with rhetorical questions and wishfully headed "from those responsible for this outrage". Contained within are observations such as "we don't collectively know very much about Elizabethan culture — not even why it's called Elizabethan", while a quick skip ahead seems to suggest the young scamps think their version of *Richard III* just "makes a better story" than Shakespeare's.

A pearl, every word, as one would expect from playwrights who have both won the Queensland Premier's Drama Award.

Normally, one would have expected La Boite's artistic director Todd MacDonald to step in and offer mature guidance but, alarmingly, MacDonald himself is there onstage, impersonating an idiotic Shakespeare in 1591 while dunking his head in a bucket of something or other.

For the record, he and Price are joined onstage by Helen Howard, Amy Ingram, Pacharo Mzembe, Atticus Robb and Peter Rowland.

As it moves beyond its 90th anniversary year, La Boite has made a bold attempt to reconnect with its amateur roots and done so with notable success.