

THEATER***Richard III***

By William Shakespeare. Dir. Carol Kastendieck. Starring Austin Pendleton. New Perspectives Theatre Company.

The New Perspectives Theatre Company's production of *Richard III* may not make our winter one of discontent, but neither will it make it a glorious summer. Director Carol Kastendieck sets out to examine evil and to present Shakespeare's history from the hunchbacked Richard's point of view. Her placement of Richard onstage for the entire play—where he observes and reacts even to scenes he's not in—is a nice and unusual touch. However, Kastendieck has squandered an opportunity. The lure of the New Perspectives theater space is its intimacy (it seats only about 60 people). Yet the director has her actors shouting at the top of their lungs throughout most of the performance, as if they were playing in a Broadway house. Richard III, as played by Austin Pendleton, is far more of a nebbish than the personification of evil. Though he can give his character a wry comic turn, Pendleton isn't a villain at all when he's not yelling.

Pendleton is an accomplished actor (and director in his own right), although he did stumble over a couple of lines. His Richard is surrounded by a decent acting ensemble, with a particularly outstanding performance by Melody Brooks as Queen Elizabeth. Listening to Brooks (who is the founder and artistic director of the company) is to revel in the beauty of the English language. Her diction is faultless and she carries herself regally. Other notable performances are delivered by India Cooper as Margaret of Anjou, Richard Omar as Hastings and Joseph W. Rodriguez as Richard's brother, the Duke of Clarence.

The fight scenes, by David Dean Hastings and Angela Bonacasa, are well choreographed, but occasionally, when the swordplay is only inches away, the audience might feel it's a little close for comfort. The production designer, Melissa Bruning, has provided fetching costumes and a simple set with platforms and steps that serve the space well. One final caveat: the seats are so uncomfortable that your back might resemble Richard's by evening's end.—*Glenn Speer*