

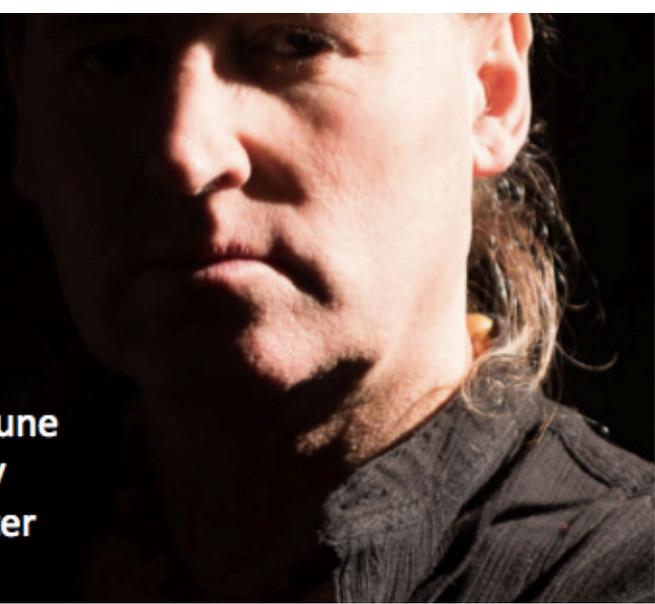
The COMBAT VETERAN PLAYERS Company

presents

RICHARD III

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon – 26th June
Leicester Square Theatre, London – 7th July
& in various schools around the UK thereafter



In this regal tragedy mortality is poised on a knife-edge as the war-hardened Duke of Gloucester plots, tricks and murders his way to England's throne to become King Richard III. Despite his ruthless ambition, Richard's asides to the audience and bad-boy allure seduce us and draw us in. He is a shameless tyrant we love to hate.

Who better to convey the darkness and danger of Shakespeare's most compelling villain, that "bottled spider" and "hunch-backed toad", and his entourage of scheming, battle-hungry courtiers than a troupe of armed forces veterans with first-hand experience of active service?

As part of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)'s Open Stages Programme in Stratford-upon-Avon, the Combat Veteran Players (CVP) brings you a one-off performance of its gritty, visceral production of *Richard III* set in a 21st century military context. The play then transfers to Leicester Square Theatre in London's West-End.

Earlier this year, on the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, CVP gave a private performance of a selection of scenes from the play for HRH Prince Charles at New Place, the Bard's home for 19 years. Previous acclaimed tours include *Henry V* (2013), *Hamlet* (2014) and *Twelfth Night* (2015) at prestigious venues such as Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, the RSC's Dell Stage and throughout London's West End.

Formed in 2011, the CVP is a theatre company composed of a diverse range of ex-Service personnel from different branches of the military who have come together to overcome mental trauma, injury and related difficulties through immersion in drama, the development of acting skills and vital performances of Shakespeare's plays. For this reason, the Company brings a unique perspective and authenticity to *Richard III*, especially to its protagonist.

The CVP has been fortunate to receive training from the RSC at Stratford-upon-Avon and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on London's Bankside. This year's production is generously supported by Help For Heroes, ABF The Soldiers' Charity and Stoll.

Notes To Editors

Title	The Combat Veteran Players presents Richard III
Performance Dates/Venues	26th June, 4pm: Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon 7th July, 6.45pm: Leicester Square Theatre, London
Running Time	120 minutes plus 20 minute break
Press Contact	Charles Dean 07531 748359
Production Contact	Amanda Faber 07952 220181 / amandapullinfaber@gmail.com
Tickets available from	Swan Theatre Box Office (by invitation only) Email: cvp.richardiii@gmail.com (for invite code word) www.rsc.org.uk/combat-veterans Leicester Square Theatre Box Office Call: 020 7734 2222 Email: boxoffice@leicestersquaretheatre.com
Artistic Director	Jaclyn McLoughlin
Producer	Amanda Faber
Manager	Nick Shatford
Assistant Producers	KT Parker Holly Hooper
Director	Imogen Beech
<i>Cast</i>	
Richard	Shaun Johnson
Clarence	David Adams
Brackenbury	Steve Morgan
Hastings/Murderer 1	Max Hamilton
Anne/Prince Edward	Nicci DeMaine
Rivers/Tyrrel	Tom Stimpson
Grey/Messenger	Clinton Green
Elizabeth	Nicola Stokes
Buckingham	Andy McCabe
Margaret	Caroline Kelly
Murderer 2/Richmond	Androcles Scicluna
Catesby	Neil Rostron
King Edward/Stanley/Scrivener	Peter Biggs
Duchess	Maurillia Simpson

Mentoring Understudies	Suzy Whitefield Tim Gibson Hadley Smith
Website	www.combatveteranplayers.org.uk
Twitter	@CombatVPlayers
Facebook	Combat Veteran Players

Quotes From The Cast And The Creative Team

Shaun Johnson, actor & ex-soldier – Richard III

Thoughts on the play

After the auditions, I was genuinely delighted to be cast as Richard III. I had been following Richard's exhumation story and the Richard III Society for several years with great interest and he had become my favourite monarch. Shakespeare wrote of Richard in a different light to that now favoured by modern historians, possibly to flatter Elizabeth I, the granddaughter of the man who defeated the last Plantagenet king.

The fact that Shakespeare wrote at a time of great religious division resonated with me too. As a Catholic myself, I struggled to make sense of the religious divide when on tours of duty in Northern Ireland in the early 1980s. My mental battle started even before I left England to fly to Belfast, since my grandmother was of Irish Catholic descent and often scolded me for "fighting my own", as she put it. I wasn't the only one affected by such pressures; some soldiers I knew were completely cut off by their families when they returned from their tours of duty in Northern Ireland.

Playing Richard

In productions of Richard III we often see actors adorned with military medals. I too decided my Richard would wear medals and in certain scenes of the play I am proud to wear not only my own medal, but also one won by my Great Grandfather in World War One and another won by Grandfather in World War Two, as well as my Father's medals.

Growth since joining CVP

The training I have received from the RSC and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre has been massively instrumental in developing my acting skills. We have had the best of the best from the RSC and the Shakespeare's Globe Education practitioners. I was once shy of Shakespeare, but now I value the art of it.

Previous roles

My first Shakespeare play was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the trendy Old Vic Tunnels in the role of Lysander. *Henry V* followed, playing the sly Dauphin and Corporal Nym. My

hardest role was playing Hamlet at the fabulous Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on London's Bankside. I had to dig deep inside to find a character to suit and often didn't like what I found in my cupboard. Last year there was a very cheerful production of *Twelfth Night* at Leicester Square Theatre. Playing Malvolio was a remarkable experience. As always the cast bonded to produce a wonderful show.

Shaun's road to recovery

I was a very different person when I left the military. I drifted, failed to connect, drank and became very depressed. After two suicide attempts and spending 10 weeks in a secure hospital, I finally began to live again. My wife Joan played a crucial role in my recovery and stayed with me through all the struggles: without her, I doubt I would be here today. She made me open up and face my mental health problems. I joined the CVP in 2010 and have literally taken off in a different direction. Confident, safe and in love with life again, I am convinced God sent Joan to save me.

The future

As much as I love Shakespeare, I'd like to experience something different to help me grow as an actor. I hope to be cast in a West-End production about a homeless veteran in early 2017. Maybe it's also time to stand on my own two feet again after all of this unforgettable life-changing support and find myself a talent agent!

Imogen Beech – Director

As Richard III is a play about war, the CVP can bring another layer to the production that no other company can. I learn something new about the play with each rehearsal. The rehearsal room is so dynamic; full of people who have such different skills and experiences that they bring to the production. Everyone is so ready to jump up to help and support each other in a way unlike any cast I have worked with before.

Jacklyn McLoughlin – Artistic Director & Founder of CVP

The CVP was initially set up as a means to provide a creative outlet for ex-Service members I was working with that would allow me to use my personal favourite texts, those of Shakespeare. What was originally meant to be a short-term project turned into what it is today because of the group members, not because of me. They discovered a shared passion for Shakespeare's work and hidden talents within themselves that had previously been un-tapped.

When they asked me to take it further, those talents and that passion were impossible to say 'no' to. They have since developed into skilled, confident, and awe-inspiring performers who have entertained audiences over a period of five years with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night*. As newcomers join the group, long-term members serve as mentors and guides to them, allowing 'their' newly

discovered skills and talents to shine through Shakespeare's verse as well. This year CVP returns to the RSC with *Richard III*, performed by a cast of long-term members and newer arrivals, all sharing a love of Shakespeare and an enthusiasm for his characters that will have audiences smiling long after the curtain drops.

We have been fortunate over the last year to successfully launch a US branch of the CVP in the greater Washington, D.C., area. The US group members will debut with their first production, *The Comedy of Errors*, in July.

Amanda Faber – Producer

I have been working with injured service personnel since 2012 when I produced an international tour of the play about injured soldiers' experiences, *The Two Worlds Of Charlie F*, by Owen Sheers. Nominated for various awards, we opened in Toronto and gave over 125 performances for audiences of over 34,000.

After meeting with Hugh Briscoe at Goldman Sachs, I was introduced to the Combat Veteran Players and became a director of the Company with its founder Jaclyn McLoughlin in 2015. The Company has expanded recently and with generous sponsorship from ABF The Soldiers' Charity, Help For Heroes and Stoll, we are looking forward to welcoming even more injured ex-service personnel into the group. This year's production of *Richard III* will be a unique and powerful addition to the growing repertoire of this award-winning company.

The Company works closely with the RSC and Shakespeare's Globe Education practitioners, who have helped the ex-service personnel to develop their acting skills. A number have started working professionally. They have joined Spotlight and have found agents since joining the group. Others have been acting and teaching in schools with Shakespeare's Soldiers (www.shakespearesoldiers.co.uk) or helping students to read as part the Soldiers' reading programme, while still others have used their new skills to give them confidence and improve their presentation skills in job interviews the workplace.