

Shelly Gaza turned in a wonderful comedic performance in her gender-bending role as Viola and Cesario. One hilarious scene featured Cesario bathing Orsino in a tub while she attempted to quell her desire for the Duke and desperately tried to avert her eyes from his submerged form. The actress also did a fantastic job depicting Cesario often forgetting to put on masculine airs and mannerisms when needed and then frantically trying to cover her tracks. Another standout performance came from Jered Tanner as Feste. Not only did his musical ability give voice to the songs Shakespeare included as a part of the play, he also memorably interacted with the audience. The entr'acte following the interval found Feste garbed as a belly dancer who gyrated his way down the aisle. He then selected a gentleman from the audience with whom he danced momentarily, then later gave him a joking "meet me later" look. The audience delighted in this personal interaction, which did not in any way distract from the playgoing experience. Quite the contrary, Tanner's exuberance in his role as Feste drew the audience further into the events of the play, as they were made to feel less like passive spectators and more like fellow denizens of the exotic land of Illyria.



### **Alabama Shakespeare Festival's *The Wars of the Roses***

#### ***Henry VI, Part A***

Presented by the **Alabama Shakespeare Festival** at the **Octagon Stage**, Montgomery, Alabama. February 23–May 17, 2007. Directed by Diana Van Fossen, Composed by James Conely, and Orchestrated by Thom Jenkins. Scene Designs by Paul Wonsek. Costumes by Beth Novak. Lighting by Paul Wonsek. Sound Design by Brett Rominger. Fight Scenes by Scot Mann and Jason Armit. With Ray Chambers (John Duke of Bedford), Anthony Reimer (Charles the Dauphin), Michael Gatto (Reignier King of Naples), Patrick McElwee (The Duke of Alencon), Paul Hopper (Humphrey Duke of Gloucester), Will Pailen (Thomas Beaufort Duke of Exeter), Jeffrey Brick (Richard Plantagenet), Gardner Reed (Joan la Pucelle), Marcus Kyd (William Earl of Suffolk), James Beaman (Lord Talbot), Lisa Bruneau (Margaret), and others.

#### ***Henry VI, Part B***

Presented by the **Alabama Shakespeare Festival** at the **Octagon Stage**, Montgomery, Alabama. March 16–June 8, 2007. Directed by Geoffrey Sherman, Composed by James Conely, and Orchestrated by Thom Jenkins. Scenes designed by Paul Wonsek. Costumes by Beth Novak. Lighting by Paul

Wonsek. Sound Design by Brett Rominger. Fight Scenes by Scot Mann and Jason Armit. Stage Manager Kimberly First. With Nick Cordileone (King Henry the Sixth), Lise Bruneau (Margaret, Queen to King Henry), Patrick McElwee (Edward Prince of Wales), Will Pailen (Duke of Exeter), Jeffrey Brick (Richard Plantagenet Duke of York), Adam Richman (Edward later King Edward IV), John-Michael Marrs (Richard Duke of Gloucester), Hollis McCarthy (Lady Elizabeth Grey), Mark Allen Jeter (Duke of Somerset), and others.

### *Richard III*

Presented by the **Alabama Shakespeare Festival** at the **Octagon Stage**, Montgomery, Alabama. April 13–June 10, 2007. Directed by Susan Willis, Composed by James Conely, and Orchestrated by Thom Jenkins. Scene and lighting by Paul Wonsek. Costumes by Elizabeth Novak. Sound by Brett Rominger. Voice and Dialect Coach Sarah Felder. Fight Scenes by Scot Mann and Jason Armit. With Adam Richman (King Edward IV), Hollis McCarthy (Elizabeth Grey, Queen to Edward IV), Dana Benningfield (Prince Edward later Edward V), Mark Robinson (Lord Grey), Ray Chambers (Richard Duke of Gloucester), Celeste Burnum (The Duchess of York), Marcus Kyd (George Duke of Clarence), James Beaman (Lord Hastings), Mark Allan Jeter (Anthony Woodville Earl of Rivers) Jeffrey Brick (Duke of Buckingham), Will Pailen (Henry Tudor Earl of Richmond later King Henry VII), and others.

JAMES N. ORTEGO II, *Troy University*

At 2:00 pm sharp on April 28, 2007, director Diana Van Fossen appeared to a capacity crowd surrounding the Octagon Stage at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival (ASF) and urged all spectators to silence their electronic devices. Her comments marked the last reference to twenty-first-century life that spectators would hear during a three-hour journey that dramatized English political upheaval and turmoil during the fifteenth century. The ASF's lively rendition of *Henry VI, Part A* remained true to Shakespeare's text in plot, characterization, and costume, but much like Shakespeare's audience, modern spectators had to rely on a lively imagination to supplement the dramatization on stage. Two large doors located at back center stage opened to a hard-wood floor about thirty feet long and twenty feet wide; two stairways on opposite ends of the center doors enabled the actors to ascend onto a smaller balcony (and spectators to upper-row seating) that served as the second story of a castle; a few props such as swords and fifteenth-century costumes completed the stage design for the play.

Anything lacking in the scenic design, however, was quickly forgotten by spectators once the talented troupe began their energetic perfor-

mance; but this dramatization of *Henry VI*, which aspired to reproduce Shakespeare's play as his audience might have experienced it, included occasionally overly vociferous delivery of dialogue, which at times dampened the spirit of his play. The sparse scenic designs and boisterous emoting aside, the ASF managed to overcome the challenges faced by any modern acting company that undertakes to dramatize Shakespeare and remain faithful to the Elizabethan dramatic spirit, and few spectators, if any, were disappointed in the final product.

The play began with the somber funeral procession of King Henry V, but quickly gave way to the political rivalry that arose between Humphrey Duke of Gloucester (Paul Hopper) and the Bishop of Winchester (Roger Forbes). Hopper and Forbes's heartfelt animosity was quickly apparent in their tone and body language; Forbes, in particular, deftly captured the spirit of an acrimonious clergyman whose dialogue more than once drew a collective gasp from the audience. And when Nick Cordileone—a young clean-shaven, soft-spoken, blond haired, blue-eyed man about 5'9" tall and 150 pounds—entered the stage as Henry VI, his royal presence did nothing to dissuade the contentious nobility, so overwhelming was their conflict. The audience quickly became engrossed in the plot against young Henry VI, but soon the scramble for power among the English nobility gave way to more pressing concerns with the French and Joan la Pucelle, the vocal and emotional star of the cast.

Gardner Webb's performance of Joan la Pucelle relied as much on volume as on crazed facial expressions; she gave spectators an entertaining performance, especially during the battle scenes. The ferocity exhibited on Webb's face—her "war grimace"—was convincing enough to prompt some spectators to hiss when she appeared shortly after with Charles the Dauphin (Anthony Reimer), whose performance relied more on his curious speech patterns than volume. Reimer performed well-enough as the leader of the French, though he lost his accent at times during the play, most notably when his pronunciation of St. Denis rhymed with *menace* instead of *tree*. His stage presence too was not as commanding as might be expected from a royal leader, but the audience did not seem to mind his occasional verbal mishaps, which did nothing to dampen the dramatization of French's struggles against Talbot (James Beaman) and the English. The animosity between the French and English was neatly performed, save one glaring omission: the deletion of any dalliance between Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne. Talbot's capture in Shakespeare's play hints at times of a romantic intrigue between the English warrior and the Countess of Auvergne, but this idea was omitted by the director, perhaps to concentrate the play's focus on political treachery.

Beaman (who soon escaped the Countess) gave a spirited performance that captured the warrior characteristics of Shakespeare's Talbot, but Beaman also displayed a talent for softer emoting during the later scene in which he grieves over the death of his son. The young John Talbot's (Mark Robinson) decision to fight the French instead of fleeing for his safety is the first in the series of deaths on stage that hasten the play to its conclusion. As Beaman lay dying and cuddling the lifeless body of his son, young Talbot tearfully peered at the entire audience, from left to center to right, once before giving up the ghost, an effective gesture that left many spectators quietly lamenting his fate.

Talbot's demise now garnered the audience's full support for the English, and even the seemingly cruel and loud death of Joan la Pucelle did little to mitigate the empathy that spectators, by this late point accustomed to Webb's boisterous speech and crazed facial expressions, for the English. Pucelle's shepherd-father was especially meek and quiet when delivering his lines; his humility provided a nice contrast to Webb's loud protestations, and even though she at times over-powered the performances by the other characters, she managed to capture the rebellious spirit of Joan la Pucelle as suggested by Shakespeare's text—as it might have appeared to the Elizabethans.

The king's marriage to Margaret (a scene that appeared in ASF's *Part A*, but actually begins *2 Henry VI*), juxtaposed with the final tumultuous end of Joan la Pucelle, returns the play's central focus to the young Henry VI. Nick Cordileone as Henry VI grew in wisdom and speech as the play progresses, but remained naïve about the political treachery of his court. Lise Bruneau as Queen Margaret (who at times was just as loud as Webb and Beaman) was convincing, but occasionally delivered emotions that contradicted the dialogue. She quickly became impatient during the scene involving Simpcox's "miracle," but Simpcox's antics are nothing more than comic relief from the play's heavy political treachery. Simpcox's dismissal was met with Margaret's claim that "It made me laugh to see the villain run," but Bruneau remained stoic rather than comic or sarcastic in her delivery of these lines. Margaret as depicted by Shakespeare is not *always* impatient and angry throughout the play; but Bruneau's performance was otherwise commendable.

Margaret by this point in *Henry VI, Part A* dominated much of the stage action, and any short-comings spectators may have noticed regarding her volume or incongruous emoting were quickly excused in favor of her lively performance and sincerity in bringing Queen Margaret to life on stage. "Part A" ended *in medias res*, however, and had spectators

wishing to see what happens next, which is always the mark of a solid dramatic performance by cast and crew.

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Where the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's performance of *Henry VI, Part A* was markedly boisterous, their rendition of *Part B* was notable for its frequent moments of an eerie silence on stage. When young Henry VI quipped, "I trust you Gloucester"; when young Richard promised allegiance to his brother, Edward; and when Margaret upon her execution uttered a curse against the House of York, spectators felt the profundity of the actors' prophetic words. The players' solemn expressions and body language during even the light-hearted moments of the play emphasized the grave turmoil of English politics in the fifteenth century, an emphasis frequently dramatized by moments of silence on stage.

*Henry VI, Part B* began right where *Henry VI, Part A* concluded: in the midst of civil unrest and political treachery. Jack Cade (James Beaman, as Talbot) and his rebellious troops commanded the audience's attention with their lively personality and the threat they posed to the throne. As the drama of Cade's rebellion unfolded, Beaman did a wonderful job presenting Jack as a lovable villain whose urbane verbal play, like that of Falstaff in *I Henry IV*, charms rather than repels spectators. Unlike Falstaff in action, however, Cade led the rebel forces that threaten the throne, but as they advance on London, King Henry VI (Nick Cordileone) for the first time in the series exhibits great wisdom, courage, and responsibility in convincing the rebels to disperse.

Young Henry VI had now seemingly grown into his position, a transition suggested by Cordileone's sudden change in tone of speech and body language; his speech was more forceful and decisive, but his success was relatively short-lived, for while Cordileone admirably portrayed the characteristics of a ruler in transition (and a boy becoming a man), Queen Margaret and the entire York household actively plotted against his life. King Henry VI's commands were often met with silence from those around him—a silence indicative of Henry VI's lack of respect from those who opposed his kingship. His age was still a factor in the play, and he still underwent harsh treatment from his Queen, Margaret; her frequently fierce tone of voice and occasionally shrewish treatment of Henry VI left spectators feeling that the young king simply did not have much of a chance to achieve the same military success as his father, Henry V. But perhaps the director (Geoffrey Sherman) chose to emphasize Henry

VI's lack of military prowess to re-enforce the thematic point that civil unrest destroys not only the monarchy, but also its subjects. Whatever the director's motivation, the solemn glances and still quiet on stage that accompanied Henry VI's commands and Margaret's ferocity ominously contributed to the deft dramatization of civil war.

As Cade's rebellion quickly ended and he met his demise in a garden (depicted on stage as a thatch of red and white roses on pikes at opposite ends of one another), the play rushed toward its conclusion. Henry VI was soon sent to the tower to live out his final days, and the Yorkist King Edward assumed command with the support of his brothers and numerous other followers. Queen Margaret (Lise Bruneau), meanwhile, was dispatched, but not without a struggle and thunderous speech that left even the audience agreeing with Richard's willingness to acquiesce to Margaret's desire for her captors to "kill me too"—just to silence her piercing speech. Had Margaret's emotional last pleas been delivered in the right tone, the audience might have sympathized with her situation. But Bruneau relied more heavily on volume than feeling or emotion to deliver Margaret's last words, and when she was finally taken into custody, the audience breathed a collective sigh of cathartic relief. The significance of Margaret's capture was emphasized by an eerie silence on stage; the Yorkist leaders briefly glanced around at each other and breathed a sigh of relief, but no one spoke. The only sound to be heard was the stomping of Richard's boots on the wooden stage as he ascended to the Tower to murder Henry VI.

The Tower scene that concluded *Henry VI, Part B* began with John-Michael Marrs as young Richard of Gloucester; but then Marrs gave way, mid-murder, to Ray Chambers, who later starred in the leading role of *Richard III*. As *Richard III* director Susan Willis explained during a "stage-side chat," the change of actors in mid-murder was designed as a dramaturgical strategy to allow the audience to see what was coming in *Richard III*. The only problem with this strategy was that for the remainder of the play, spectators murmured and wondered why the two actors switched roles during—not before or after—the murder of Henry VI. Ray Chambers also played the parts of the Father who grieves for a dead son, Louis XI, King of France, and young Richard in *Henry VI, Part B*, and his role reversal may have confused, even upset, some audience members; like the members of the on-stage court audience in the final scene, the theatrical audience remained eerily silent as Richard swore allegiance to Edward IV and his chosen queen, Lady Elizabeth Grey. Thus *Henry VI, Part B* concluded in much the same way that it began: with a brief silence



on stage. For a play filled with loud action, confusing political alliances, and multiple deaths, much of *Henry VI, Part B* was notable for its moments of strange quiet on stage, here intended to suggest that the play's closure was a moment of uneasy peace; here, as throughout, the stillness incited spectators to shuffle nervously in their seats. But the talented cast always ensured that any silent moments on stage were soon disrupted by an energetic return to the play's events. In the end, the cast was treated to an enthusiastic ovation, and more than a few catcalls directed at Ray Chambers, the "new" Richard and hope of the York family.

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If *Henry VI, Part A* was notable for its noise and action, and *Part B* for its silence, then *Richard III* was notable, strangely enough, for its laughter. From the now famous first lines that open *Richard III*, "Now is the winter of our discontent . . .," Ray Chambers captivated the audience with his portrayal of Richard III as a lovable villain depicted more as a rascal than a cold-hearted murderer. Chamber's boyish good looks and charisma enchanted the audience, and he soon not only won over Queen Margaret (Lise Bruneau, who was still almost screaming her lines on occasion), but the audience as well. Richard's promises to gain the throne by murdering George and his nephews was met by a tittering of laughter from spectators, which was a disturbingly odd response considering the cruelty of his actions. Perhaps the charm of Chambers enthralled the audience, or perhaps his boyish good looks diverted their attention away from his murderous schemes, but at any rate, director Susan Willis chose to gloss over Richard III's villainous intentions regarding his nephews, almost ensuring an amicable depiction of the king.

As the play moved along and Richard III secured the love of Margaret fairly easily, his jockeying for the throne was aided by Sir William Catesby (Greg Thornton), who proved to possess just as much if not more wickedness than Richard. With Thornton's help, Richard was soon offered the crown, which he refused numerous times out of "policy," but eventually accepted. The audience, meanwhile, chuckled and elbowed one another as they watched Richard's false attempts of humility. He played to the mayor and townspeople perfectly, much to the joy of the spectators, and by the end of the third act, he was firmly established as the king of England. Despite the protests by other characters such as Queen Margaret and Lord Hastings, the audience continuously met Richard III's every move with an amusement often reserved for the antics of small children;

loud laughter is not typically associated with serious dramatizations of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, but laugh the ASF audience did, and often.

The Lancasters, however, were not simply sitting back and laughing along with the audience at Richard's antics, but instead were plotting to regain the throne. Henry Tudor of Richmond (Anthony Reimer) rallied his troops from village to village and town to town, an action the audience learned by messenger's report, and his grimly serious expressions and urgent tone of voice let the spectators know that Henry Tudor was a serious challenger to Richard's throne. In the scenes where Reimer and Chambers appeared together, it was Reimer as Henry Tudor—not Chambers as Richard III—who drew hisses from spectators. The play moved along quickly and sometimes comically once Richard III secured the throne, until the point of the famous battle scene in act five, during which the tempo slowed and the laughter at Richard's antics gradually diminished. The most memorable stage event in act five was the parade of ghosts who tormented Richard before the decisive battle at Bosworth Field. Played by the cast members who played the original characters Richard III had murdered, each ghost, dressed all in black and made up in white face, appeared near the opening of Richard's tent. The dark attire and pale white make-up along with the smoke effects and eerie background music provided a chilling moment that briefly stilled any laughter in the audience. And the number of ghosts who appeared (eleven all told), each one representing a formerly living and able body, reminded the audience that Richard's climb to power was indeed bloody and brutal. Almost as suddenly as it had begun, the laughter was over, and stillness filled the stage.

Once the ghosts had completed their lines and fulfilled their purpose, the battle began, and the audience in anticipation almost chanted along with Chambers Richard III's now famous line, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" Chambers is a talented actor, and his delivery of this line (and the others in the battle scene) were spoken with a sense of urgency and fear not yet shown by Richard thus far in the play. Richard's battle problems, however, evoked mild amusement from the audience, and almost as soon as it began, the battle ended, order was restored, and the sound of gentle laughter that accompanied much of Chamber's lines gave way to quiet admiration and wonder. Chambers and cast had done a very nice job with *Richard III*, for which they were whole-heartedly applauded by the audience; who, after all, can get enough of Richard's antics, good, bad, or funny?



Shakespeare is indeed live and well in Montgomery, Alabama, and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival well rewards the efforts of anyone near or far who witnesses this talented group perform Shakespeare plays live. The ASF does not promise to maintain strict adherence to Shakespeare's text, nor to the dramaturgical practices of the Elizabethan era, but rather simply commits its talented performers to re-creating the spirit of Shakespeare's drama; and patrons are always rewarded with a visit to the ASF in Montgomery, Alabama.



### *Richard III*

Presented by **The Shakespeare Theatre Company** at the **Lansburg Theatre**, Washington, DC. January 16–March 18, 2007. Directed by Michael Kahn. Set by Lee Savage. Costumes by Jennifer Moeller. Lighting by Charlie Morrison. Compositions/Sound by Martin Desjardins. Fights by David Leong. With Geraint Wyn Davies (Richard), Floyd King (Edward IV), Andrew Long (Clarence), Pamela-Peyton-Wright (Duchess of York), Tana Hicken (Queen Margaret), Claire Lautier (Lady Anne), Margot Dionne (Queen Elizabeth), Donald Carrier (Rivers), Dan Crane (Grey), Matthew Stuckey (Dorset), Edward Gero (Buckingham), Raphael Nash Thompson (Hastings), Ralph Cosham (Stanley), Aubrey Deeker (Catesby), David Gross (Richmond), and others.

### *Titus Andronicus*

Presented by **The Shakespeare Theatre Company** at the **Lansburg Theatre**, Washington, DC. April 3–May 20, 2007. Directed by Gale Edwards. Set by Peter England. Costumes by Murell Horton. Lighting by Mark McCullough. Compositions/Sound by Martin Desjardins. Fights by Rick Sordelet. With Sam Tsoutsouvas (Titus Andronicus), William Langan (Marcus Andronicus), Chris Genebach (Lucius), Christopher Scheeren (Quintus), David Murgitroyd (Martijs), Danny Binstock (Mutius), Colleen Delany (Lavinia), Alex Podulke (Saturninus), Michael Brusasco (Bassianus), James Chatham (Young Lucius), Valerie Leonard (Tamora), Matthew Stuckey (Alarbus), Ryan Farley (Demetrius), David L. Townsend (Chiron), Peter Macon (Aaron), and others.

### *Hamlet*

Presented by **The Shakespeare Theatre Company** at the **Lansburg Theatre**, Washington, DC. June 5–July 29, 2007. Directed by Michael Kahn. Set by Walt Spangler. Costumes by Murell Horton. Lighting by Charlie Morrison. Compositions by Adam Wernick. Sound by Martin Desjardins. Fights by David Leong. Puppet Design by Aaron Cromie. With Jeffrey