

William Shakespeare *Richard the Kid & the King*

Karin Henkel directs Shakespeare's *Richard the Kid & the King* at the 2021 Salzburg Festival. Photo: SF/Anne Zeuner

With *Richard III*, one of the greatest antiheroes of the theatrical canon enters the stage: shameless, greedy, violent, yet also perceptive, witty, dissembling and seductive. He adeptly manipulates people and revels in self-aggrandizement.

(SF, 5 March 2021) For the first time, this charismatic figure appears onstage at the Salzburg Festival; William Shakespeare indubitably played an outstanding role in Max Reinhardt's artistic output, not least because of this legendary production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. ***Richard the Kid & the King*** will be directed by Karin Henkel, who enjoyed tremendous success at the 2017 Salzburg Festival with Gerhart Hauptmann's *Rose Bernd*.

Karin Henkel makes Shakespeare's royal dramas *Henry VI* and *Richard III* the point of departure for her production. In *Richard the Kid*, the first part of the evening, she focuses on Richard's childhood and family history, the brutish period before he came to power. For years, the houses of York and Lancaster had been fighting the 'Wars of the Roses'; bitter and bloody battles for control of the English throne. In *Richard the King*, the second part of the evening, Karin Henkel turns to the political environment surrounding the infamous ruler. Numerous questions are asked here: why does everyone play along, even though they know about Richard's lies and duplicity? How does Richard manage the cynical balancing act of harbouring deep loathing towards people while still winning them over for his purposes?

Lina Beckmann, who celebrated enormous success at the Salzburg Festival as *Rose Bernd* in 2017, takes on the title role. The cast also features Kristof Van Boven, Sachiko Hara, Paul Herwig, Alexander Maria Schmidt, Maik Solbach, Kate Strong, Bettina Stucky and Michael Weber. The co-production with the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg is scheduled to open at the Perner-Insel in Hallein on 25 July.

Ms. Henkel, Shakespeare's Richard III is performed for the first time in the history of the Festival. To you, what is the piece about, which do you consider its most important aspects?

To me, one of the central questions of the piece is: how instable is a society which allows a tyrant to rule? How is it possible that such a person seizes power, when everyone knows that he will be a despotic ruler? The most interesting aspect is which role the abettors play, and why they become abettors in the first place. Richard lies; he is a criminal. That is obvious to everyone, and everyone knows that things will get dangerous under his rule. Yet they are seducible. Why is that so? That is the fascinating and the frightening aspect of the play. I think that his followers profit from the situation, and that is why they allow themselves to be seduced. The characters surrounding him are no less coarse and brutal than Richard himself. 'I am a villain. Everyone knows that' – of course Richard is the main villain, but many of his companions are no less evil than he is! All the figures in this play are victims and perpetrators at the same time. That is also true for Richard. He suffers much in childhood. He grows up amidst an unending civil war, experiences bloody brutality first-hand and is forced to endure relentless humiliation – not least from his own mother. Even as a teenager, he dreams of capturing a position of power, and from that time, he pursues this goal relentlessly. Another central question is whether this narcissistic, coarse, brutal, hatred-driven and morally indefensible man could have been prevented from attaining a position of power.



Yet Richard III is not all bad; he is often also perceptive, witty and seductive. He is one of the most complex figures in theatrical literature. He manipulates people and revels in self-aggrandizement. Why are you casting Richard III with a woman?

That is mainly due to the actress Lina Beckmann, who has an incredible range. Humour, a great sense for tragedy, coupled with wisdom, quick-wittedness and versatility – all that is required of a performer playing Richard III. Richard makes allies of the audience. He always announces what he is going to do, what his strategy is to seduce the people around him. As a viewer, we are seduced by him into comprehending, even sharing his cruellest thoughts and desires.

I see Richard neither as a man nor woman; the role is written without a gender. He is a toad – that is what he calls himself. He has given up all clichéd attributes of masculinity. Physically, Richard also describes himself as a deformed human being who has never experienced love or sexuality. He knows no affection and is unable to give love. He claims that he is the most uncompassionate and unloving being in existence. He calls himself a being, he never calls himself a man. Of course, this theatrical figure is almost invariably played by a man – all the more intriguing to cast a



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woman in the role now. Incidentally, our performance – like many of my productions – features several figures who are cast without a specific gender.

How important is continuity to you regarding actresses and actors, your artistic team, the theatres you work at?

Continuity is very important to me! On the one hand it is about familiarity; of course it also saves time if you know each other well. It makes it easier to be radical, for you always try together to go that extra step, to experiment more, to dare more. Work does not end when a production ends. If you know your partners well, it is not necessary to begin from scratch every time. That is incredibly valuable to me. Therefore I am very faithful regarding the performers, the team and the theatres where I work.

What times do we live in that such things are even possible?

How instable is a society which
permits a tyrant to rule?

In 2018 you won the Berlin Theatre Prize, and the jury stated, among other things, that you examine the basic conditions of social coexistence in your productions. In an interview, you said that theatre is not about moderation, but about transcending boundaries, always retaining the ability to surprise. You said that theatre can be loud, garish, brutal and contradictory. How do you yourself view your work? How do you choose your plays? How do you approach directing a new piece?

It varies greatly, but often it has to do with the performers. As it did in this case: I already knew that Lina Beckmann as Richard III would have such seductive powers and be such a joyful performer that it was decisive in choosing the play. And of course I start with the content of the text. The question we ask ourselves when searching for plays is this: which social and political structures or philosophical issues occupy us at the moment? The world we then create on stage does not have to be a reflection of our reality, but we should be familiar with the motivations, fears and longing of the figures from our own lives. On stage, however, you are permitted, almost obliged to exaggerate and take things to extremes.

You are returning to the Perner-Insel – does the place play a role in developing the piece?

Where you stage a piece plays a large role, since every location brings other elements into the mix. However, it is more important to me whom I am working with, which artists I am dealing with. The city itself is not so tangible to me, especially if it is a festival where many visitors come from afar. The physical stage, the theatre, however, is very important. In Hallein, for example, we have a large industrial hall, unlike a classical theatre building with a portal and a



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foyer. This does not only affect the form and manner of playing, but also content and perception.

Your 2017 Festival production of Hauptmann's Rose Bernd was highly acclaimed by audience and reviewers alike. Are you happy to return to Salzburg? Which memories do you have of your time at the Salzburg Festival?

I have very good memories of the Salzburg Festival and very good memories of Hallein. There, one is rather removed from the hustle and bustle of Salzburg's centre. Three years ago, I found a wonderful team of colleagues here, all of whom supported our work 100 percent. I can say that I was really longing for our reunion in 2020.

The production of Richard III was originally planned for 2020. The coronavirus pandemic made it necessary to reschedule it for 2021. You were not idle during this time and have reworked and expanded your concept, so that we will see not just Shakespeare's Richard III; instead you have combined it with Henry VI. Can you tell us more about this development?

When Salzburg had to cancel the production for the summer of 2020 due to the coronavirus, the Schauspielhaus in Hamburg had asked us to keep the premiere there in October anyway. The solution was to split the evening in half: *Richard the Kid* and *Richard the King*. The first part was to premiere in Hamburg, the second at the Salzburg Festival. Unfortunately, the performances in Hamburg could not take place – not because of the coronavirus, but because Lina Beckmann tore her Achilles tendon during the rehearsals. In Salzburg, we will now tell the story of *Richard the Kid* and *Richard the King* in one evening, from Richard's childhood to his reign and death.

Photo service: <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/fotoservice/richard-iii>

Lina Beckmann © Jeanne Degraa



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William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)

RICHARD THE KID & THE KING

based on William Shakespeare (1564-1616) with texts by Tom Lanoye (* 1958)

New Production

Premiere: 25 July

7 further performances through 5 August

Perner-Insel, Hallein

Karin Henkel Director

Katrin Brack Sets

Klaus Bruns Costumes

Arvild J. Baud Music

Rainer Casper Lighting

Sybille Meier, Andrea Schwieter Dramaturgy

Featuring

Lina Beckmann, Kristof Van Boven, Sachiko Hara, Paul Herwig, Alexander Maria Schmidt, Maik Solbach, Kate Strong, Bettina Stucky, Michael Weber

Co-production with the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg

Further information: <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/p/richard-the-kid-the-king>