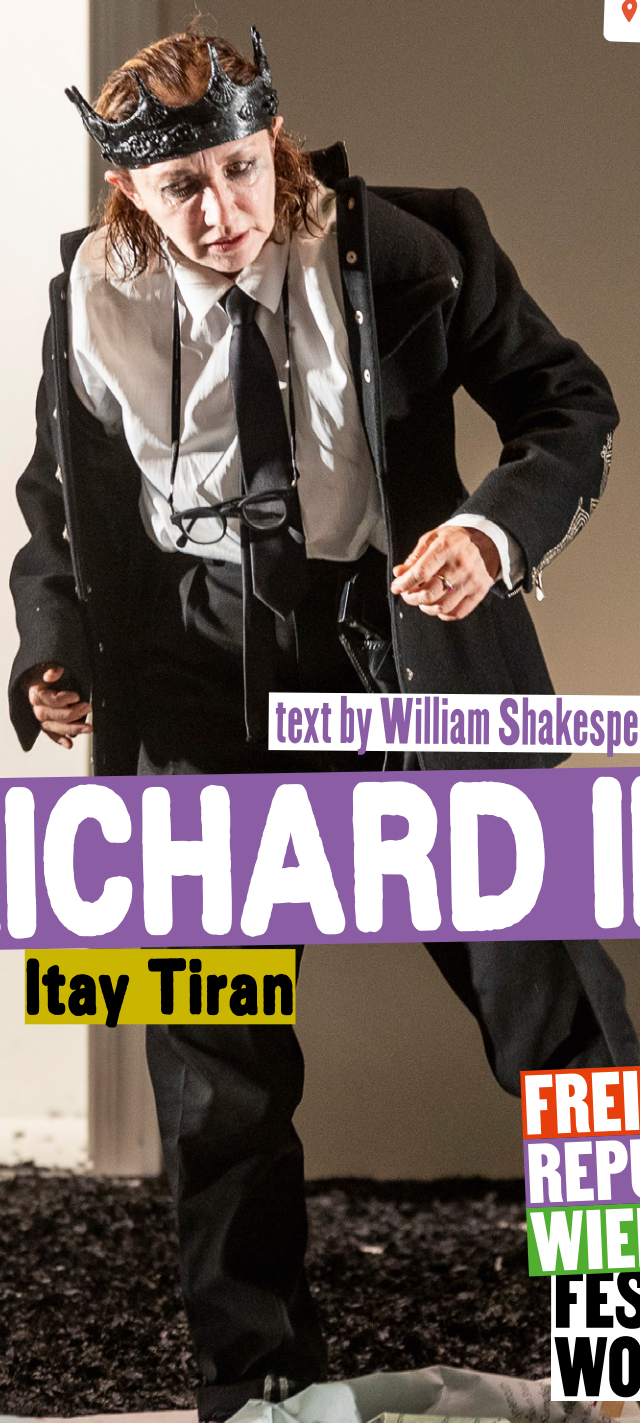




21 – 23 May



Theater Akzent



text by William Shakespeare

RICHARD III

Itay Tiran

FREIE
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Itay Tiran's *Richard III* is an unsparingly critical reflection on the political present day in his home country of Israel. It is a touching play about a national tragedy in which the personal is irretrievably bound up with the political. The extraordinary actor Evgenia Dodina plays Richard as an inwardly offended villain who stops at nothing on his way to the throne and who is more focused on maintaining his power than on defending his country. Tiran does not add a *single* new line of spoken text to Shakespeare's play. But he does let his ensemble sing songs that are connected to key moments in the history of Israel: lyrical songs in bloodied atmosphere that are about liberation, peace and patriotism. For the Israeli-Jewish star actor and director, this production of Shakespeare's famous royal drama was the first work in his home country after he had left it for Europe five years before. The premiere in Jaffa took place one month before the massacre on 7 October 2023. Since then, the hotly debated staging has been considered prophetic.

🗣 Hebrew

CC German and English surtitles

🕒 approx. 3 hrs, incl. 1 intermission

♿ barrier-free access

Q&A

22 May, following the performance,
moderated by Barbara Staudinger
(Director of the Jewish Museum Vienna)

SUN, BRING ME SUN!

Direction Itay Tiran **Music, Translation Hebrew (after the original text by Shakespeare)** Dori Parnes **Stage design** Eran Atzmon **Costume** Judith Aharon **Light design** Gleb Filshinsky **Movement direction** Renana Raz **Sound design** Michael Vaisburd **Musical production** Amit Poznansky **Video** Victor Sorokin

With **Evgenia Dodina** Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later King Richard III **Doron Tavori** King Edward IV, brother to Richard / Duchess of York, mother of Richard, Edward, and Clarence **Israel (Sasha) Demidov** George, Duke of Clarence, brother to Edward and Richard / Lord Stanley **Gilad Kletter** Duke of Buckingham **Michal Weinberg** Queen Elizabeth, Edward's wife **Lena Fraifeld** Lady Anne, widow of Edward, son to the late King Henry VI; later wife to Richard **Alexander Senderovich** Lord Hastings / Lord Mayor of London **Paulo E. Moura** Sir William Catesby **Eli Menashe** Sir Robert Brakenbury, Lieutenant of the Tower in London **Noam Tal** Earl Rivers, brother to Queen Elizabeth / Prince Edward **Shir Sayag** Lord Grey, son of Queen Elizabeth by her former marriage / Duke of York (the son) **Shlomi Bertonov** Murderer **Maxim Rosenberg** The Bishop of Ely **Direction assistance** Yoav Dagan **Surtitles** Hannah Shato

Production Gesher Theatre (Tel-Aviv)

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

World premiere September 2023, Gesher Theatre (Tel-Aviv)

IT'S A POLITICAL AGE

INTERVIEW WITH ITAY TIRAN

How is Shakespeare's *Richard III* related to current political conflicts?

How is it not? It is so much more than a history drama: it is a seismographic piece of writing that uncovers the mechanisms of power and their mode of operation in a divided society and it does that in a way that remains as relevant today as it was during Shakespeare's time. In other words: We haven't learnt a thing! Richard is thus a brand that maintains its currency although its prototype is rooted in the Middle Ages, because there is a whole range of political rogues, populists and cynics who are ready to bend the truth, the law and moral standards in order to foster their own interests and attain power. They do this by recognising and exploiting social weaknesses, by distorting the truth, basic assumptions, by dividing and manipulating. The great irony is the fact that Richard is depicted as physically disabled in the play, while in reality it is about a society with a weakened immune system that falls prey to an autoimmune disease.

You returned to your homeland of Israel for this production after several years of self-imposed exile. Why?

One of the reasons I left Israel was that I was looking for new ways to develop artistically: to literally and figuratively learn a new language. I also left because I could no longer normalise the political climate in Israel, complex as it is, as an everyday

experience. As a human being, as a citizen, as an artist, I needed distance, I needed to gain a new perspective, to be able to understand this reality. I considered this odyssey a total experience and consciously avoided working in Israel during the first years – it was a kind of self-imposed exile in order to avoid falling into a comfort zone. Much has changed since then. Unfortunately, the nationalist tendency in the country has grown to frightening dimensions, together with a growing threat to the mechanisms that are responsible for the checks and balances in Israeli democracy. Some time in 2023, at a flash-point around the government attempts to reform the justice system and the tens of thousands who were protesting against this, I felt a strong need to work together with my colleagues in the country, and felt ready to meet again. I had the feeling that this was a moment between salvation and apocalypse and decided that if I do something in Israel it has to be about this very tension.

There is a song – it is one of the most beautiful and popular songs in Israel – which is called *I Have No Other Country*. We use it during the performance. One of the famous lines of the song goes: 'I will not stay silent, because my country changed her face. I will not give up reminding her and sing in her ears until she will open her eyes.'

The text itself is hardly altered in this production, but the added element of song establishes an entirely new context for Shakespeare's play. How did this idea come about?

Richard's first monologue starts with the image of summer sunshine that announces peace and breaks through the winter clouds of war. While I was working on the piece, I was constantly thinking of the song *Light* by Shoshana Damari, one of the most renowned singers in the history of Hebrew song. The refrain of the song goes: 'Sun, bring the sun from cloudy skies.' It is a consensual song, it forms part of the canon that everybody in Israel knows and it is always sung on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem during the Independence Day celebration. This ceremony is in itself a unique occasion: The first part concludes Memorial Day for Israel's Fallen Soldiers and the Victims of Terrorism, and then there is a sudden transition with a song to start the Independence Day celebrations with fireworks and songs. I remember seeing this ceremony and this song and thinking about this sudden, impossible transition from grief to joy, from ash to rebirth. The transition never felt organic to me. It felt like a bipolar disorder. Close to Eros and Thanatos. To me, that dissonance is reflected in some part of that forced atmosphere of peace at the beginning of the play.

Songs are able to remind us of a certain point in time, a memory and a very specific feeling – and popular songs can do this collectively for a group. I realised at that moment that there would be an immediate emotional conflation of the audience and Shakespeare when the song sets in while the audience is sitting in the auditorium

and sees the scene. It is a connection that creates that which Freud describes as 'uncanny'. From this, I started wanting to create more such connections and thus Dori Parnas and I assembled the anthology of songs for the performance.

SONGS ARE ABLE TO REMIND US OF A CERTAIN POINT IN TIME, A MEMORY AND A VERY SPECIFIC FEELING – AND POPULAR SONGS CAN DO THIS COLLECTIVELY FOR A GROUP

The performance is powered by actor Evgenia Dodina as Richard. Why did you consider her compelling for this role?

Above all, Evgenia is a wonderful actor. She is intuitive, full of charisma and able to express the vulnerable, bleeding, human side behind the monster called Richard. I never considered the fact that she is playing a man relevant. For me, she is playing an archetype. I also think that Shakespeare wanted to depict something fundamental in the human experience: raw, unprocessed, an element of nature, chaos, destruction and ruin. Chaos has no gender.

You played the role of Richard yourself as an actor over a decade ago. How did this experience influence your work in this production and how do you switch roles from director to actor?

These are two different productions and two different experiences. But of course I

came to this project having already spent many hours with Richard. That helped me in terms of dramaturgy and preparation of the version of the play, the treatment and abridgement. Beyond that, playing Richard and generally being an actor always allows me as the director to walk in the actors' shoes – the character's shoes. It doesn't matter how far I go when I interpret a play: The actor is always the centre for me.

In *Burgtheater* after Elfriede Jelinek, which you as the cast developed together with director Milo Rau for this year's Vienna Festival, you also lean on your own biography to develop your role. How important is your background for your work as an artist?

Working with Milo was the first time I experimented with documentary theatre where my biography was an integral part of the play. That is a new experience for me. Normally, I need a mask to tell the truth. For me, my identity was always a raw material, but never the topic. Here, the mask falls off the face and that creates a certain feeling of nudity and vulnerability. It is a strange, slightly alarming sensation. But it is also inspiring and in this moment in time it is also necessary.

One month after the premiere of *Richard III* in Jaffa, Hamas committed the massacre of 7 October 2023, which was followed by the Israeli war against Palestine that is still ongoing. How has your understanding of your own production changed since the premiere?

When the production was opened, it was a warning of what might happen. After 7 October, it became a memento mori: a reminder of death, of what has already

happened. It chronicles destruction, death and ruin and leaves us with a single moral that can provide some comfort: all tyrants, no matter how terrible, all meet the same end – they fall! But a society that lacks health and solidarity is cursed to keep offering fecund ground for the development of free radicals that attack from inside and from outside.

How political does art have to be?

It has no choice. It is inevitably political. Even art that appears to avoid talking about politics has a political attitude by dint of its silence and its escapism. The Polish poet Wisława Szymborska wrote a magnificent poem titled *Children of Our Age*, in which she writes: 'We are children of our age, it's a political age. All day long, all through the night, all affairs – yours, ours, theirs – are political affairs.' It is one of the most remarkable symptoms of a society on the brink of downfall that the arts take an increasing turn towards entertainment.

What do you hope for?

Most of all, I hope not to lose hope. In such days that takes work. It feels as if the pendulum of history was swinging towards a low point again. It is necessary to act, to resist. There is no other choice.

The interview was conducted in writing by Tarun Kade (Vienna Festival | Free Republic of Vienna) in May 2025.

BIOGRAPHY

Israeli-born **Itay Tiran** is an accomplished director and performer who has made his mark in theatre, cinema, and television both in his homeland and internationally. His extensive theatrical career at the Cameri Theatre features numerous leading roles, including memorable performances as *Hamlet*, *Richard II* and *Richard III* and the titular character in *Woyzeck*, as well as standout portrayals in *Festen* (as Christian), *Amadeus* (as Mozart), and *Ghetto* (as Kittel). His remarkable repertoire also includes lead roles in *Mephisto*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Cabaret* (as the Emcee), *Ivanov*, *The Threepenny Opera* (as Mack the Knife), *Scenes from a Marriage* (as Johann), and *The Crucible* (as John Hale), among various other productions.

In Israeli cinema, Tiran has established himself through prominent roles in several notable films including *Forgiveness*, *The Debt*, *Lebanon*, *Beaufort*, *Demon*, and *Run By Run*, along with other significant productions. His transition to directing began in 2010 with a production of *Woyzeck*, followed by *Little Man What Now*, both staged at the Cameri Theatre. He expanded his directorial work to opera, helming *The Banality of Love* by Ella Milch-Sheriff in Regensburg. His contributions to the Israeli Opera include *Salome* (2019) and *Le nozze di Figaro* (2015) in Akko. He also works in Vienna at the *Burgtheater*, he is performing in *Burgtheater* directed by Milo Rau during this edition of the Vienna Festival and is currently preparing a new production for the Gesher Theatre.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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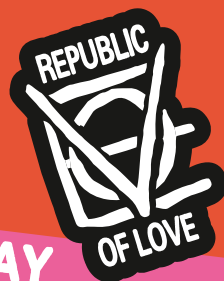
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