

Special Thanks

The “Special Thanks” usually comes at the end of a program, if at all, but I want to put it here, at the beginning. Without these people, this show would never have been, and thanks is the least of what I owe every one of them. To me, the people are more important than the play, and this is the best way I can show you the real Rude Mechanicals.

Thanks to Joshua Engel, first and foremost, for co-directing this with me. For occasionally checking and challenging my assumptions, for backing me up to the hilt, for being so indescribably helpful that he often knows what I’ll need before I do. Thanks to Jack Wibbe and Lauren Zambreny, for the million seemingly invisible things they both do to keep the troupe together, body and spirit. Thanks to Leanne Mitchell for the initial legwork that helped get the play off the ground. Thanks to the Greenbelt Arts Center for the loan of their carpets.

Thanks to Chenoa Jones for bringing us her creativity, her competence and her experience as a truly outstanding stage manager. Thanks to Kris Andersen and Evan Haag for all the tremendous help they’ve given us over the last several months, set painting and workshop filming. Thanks to Brett Estey for being willing to understudy Henry on short notice, and for actually being able to pull it off. Thanks to everyone who ever gave Peter Eichman a lift to rehearsals. Thanks to Peter Eichman and Lauren Zambreny for being willing to tackle the lights for us.

Thanks to everyone for bearing with a difficult rehearsal process that was interrupted and/or made more difficult by Acts of God, terrorism and high school that were completely out of anyone’s ability to control. I doubt any cast has ever overcome all the setbacks that this one had to. The fact that they’re putting on a good show in spite of it all is nothing less than a miracle. But they’re an amazing group of people, and a second family to me.

Thank you all, every one of you, for going so far above and beyond.

About the Play

James Goldman describes “The Lion in Winter” as a comedy. I disagree. Like “Romeo and Juliet” or “The Cherry Orchard,” it might have started out that way. But what it attains is something altogether richer, darker, more complex, with a deliberately unsettled and less than happy ending. The emotional ambiguity of the piece lends itself to real, gutsy and three-dimensional choices and characterizations, of a kind too many community theater troupes miss in the search for cheap laughs.

The surface story is a dark comedy centered on the Plantagenet family. It takes place in medieval England, at a fictional Christmas court that never was, in Chinon in 1183. The events might have been fictional, but the characters were larger than life and endlessly fascinating. King Henry II of England and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, loved fiercely and fought passionately through a marriage of more than thirty years. “The Lion in Winter” follows Henry, Eleanor and their three sons through intricate political machinations and increasing tensions, as they maneuver to determine who the next king will be.

Ultimately, it’s got nothing to do with “who comes next, or which son gets the sunset.” The political machinations are a foil for the failing relationship of Henry and Eleanor, and the sons who’ve suffered and secretly ached through years of the same bitter quarrels.

“The Lion in Winter” is a play about aging, family and the human need for love, as resonant and relevant to the twenty-first century as it would have been to the twelfth. Times change, but people remain the same.

About Risk

We conducted “Lion in Winter” as a basic acting workshop, with most of the roles being split between actors who worked together to form the basis for their characterizations. There were long, convoluted and interesting discussions of background stories and interrelationships. We tried to impart to our actors the difference between playing a cardboard character and becoming a vital, believable, three dimensional human being onstage.

I’d rather see my actors fail with an interesting choice than succeed with a safe one, and this play is filled with interesting and risky choices. Lauren Zambreny (John) plays a fourteen year old boy, something few actresses could hope to pull off convincingly. She succeeds, and her understated performance is fascinating to watch. Peter Eichman’s John is an alcoholic, which led to choices that are funny, sad and unsettling by turns. Peter and Lauren took more advantage of their rolesharing than just about anyone else, and it yielded deep insights and interesting results for both of them.

Joshua Engel (Director, Richard), Jay Henry and Brett Estey (Philip) are the only actors I’ve ever seen who didn’t shy away from the Philip/Richard relationship or waste what I consider the single most powerful moment in the entire play. It fell flat in the movie, and in every other version I’ve seen to date, but love or hate what we do with it, it doesn’t fall flat here. Theirs is the single gutsiest set of choices I’ve ever seen enacted on a community theater stage.

Some of the best choices were pure accident. Dave Rusiecki’s methodical and calculating Geoffrey has an obsessive-compulsive streak I’m absolutely in love with. It’s a perfect choice for the character, and it came about because he was neatening up the chess table one evening in rehearsal.

“That’s perfect!” I exclaimed happily. “An obsessive-compulsive Geoffrey! Brilliant! Do that!”

“Umm,” he told me, “I was just straightening out the chess table.”

“Oh,” I said, a little deflated. “Well, go with it anyway!” Choice or accident, that one works. I mention only the actors and choices that were the most off-the-wall and fun, but everyone has given deep and obvious thought to what they’re going to present to you tonight.

A larger, better established troupe has expectations to contend with, a certain mold to have to fit. The Rude Mechanicals are rebels. We reject the mold, because we have that freedom. We have the freedom to take risks, to make interesting choices. We’ll fail at least as often as we’ll succeed, because that’s the nature of risk. But we’ll never bore you.

“The Rude Mechanicals,” to quote the Washington Post’s Michael Toscano, “are neither. [They] have set a high standard for making the classics available to local audiences.” We want to take the classics we love and make you see in them all the life, humor, grief and passion that we do. If we have a single driving creed, for acting and for life, it’s that anything worth doing is worth doing well.

About the Cast



Elise Berg (Alais) is deeply grateful for a role in a Rude Mechanicals play in which she actually gets to act out her heterosexual impulses. This performance is respectfully dedicated to Cheesy Poofs and Snacky Smores.



Jaki Demarest (Director, Eleanor) has found in the Rude Mechanicals something she hasn't had in years: a place to play. She's studied at Mason Gross with Avery Brooks, at HB Studios in New York, and the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington DC. Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway, she's played Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*, Laura in *Creatures of Great Personal Valor*, Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Hamlet, and Mephistopheles in *Faust* among others, with a national tour as Roxane in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Then, of course, she ran out of money and came home to get a real job. She'd like to thank the Rude Mechs for their indulgence of all her wacky ideas, Josh for what's left of her sanity, Fluffy the Plantagenet cat, for giving us target practice, and Target stores, for keeping David Rusiecki in such a fine selection of undershirts.



Peter Eichman (John) is returning to the Rude Mechanicals after a brief study break; he was last seen with us in *Hamlet*. We're delighted to have him back, because we really like grabbing him by the collar and throwing him around.



Joshua Engel (Director, Richard) is very nervous because he's on stage without William Shakespeare to hide behind. Thanks to the cast and crew of *Lion* for working very hard and hanging together for a play so plagued by external perils that you'd think it was set in Scotland. Thanks to Jaki for her leadership through it all. [That "leadership", of course, mostly consisted of saying wise things like, "Yes, I meant for the roof to fall in. Of course I knew the school was closed and the police would be sending dogs in after us. It's part of your acting training. Let's all go to Jack's now for another line run and table talk." -Editor's note.]



Brett Estey (Philip, understudy for Henry) is pleased to be in his third production with The Rude Mechanicals. In the short time he's been with the group he has left a lasting impression on everyone and managed to make himself horribly embarrassed throughout. More importantly he is happier that a punched donkey to be doing the one (clean) thing he enjoys: acting. Carpe Scriptum.



Jay Henry (Philip) is on his third Rude Mechanicals show, and having now been cast as a sailor and a gay French king, he wonders if his directors are trying to tell him something. He hides behind his lovely wife Elise, and dedicates his performance to her.



Jeff Hersh (Geoffrey, Stage Manager) is delighted to finally be able to break the 'nice guy' mold of his two previous Rude Mechanicals plays, *Twelfth Night* and *Henry VI*. Jeff, we didn't know you had it in you to be that cold and smarmy, and you scare us. But we mean that in a good way.



Chenoa Jones (Stage Manager) is glad to be working with the Rude Mechanicals again, and we're delighted to have her back. She'll be returning again to work with us on the spring production.



David Rusiecki (Geoffrey) is happy to return to yet another Rude Mechanicals production. Thanks to Jaki and Josh for this opportunity. He would also like to thank Wendy's combo-meals, 7-11 Slurpees, and the manufacturers of Mountain Dew. And yes, David still purchases his beloved undershirts at all area Target stores.



Jack Wibbe (Henry) has been waiting for twenty years to be able to play this role. Other acting credits include *Lear*, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, Richard III, and Malvolio in the recent Rude Mechanicals production of *Twelfth Night*.



Lauren Zambreny (John) was last seen in RM'S *Henry 6*. She has also been seen in RM productions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Nights Dream*. Thanks to the RM company & esp. to Jaki, Josh & Jack. I will miss you guys.



Rachel Zirkin (Alais) is thrilled to be in her FIFTH RM production! Between holding down a full-time job and going to graduate school, she is burning the candle at both ends, but is eternally grateful to have such a wonderful group of crazy actors to work with. Much thanks to Jaki and Josh - as well as the whole cast and crew. You guys are the best!

The Rude Mechanicals present

The Lion in Winter

Produced by permission of Samuel French

The Cast

In Order of Appearance

Friday Nights:

| | |
|-----------|----------------|
| Alais: | Rachel Zirkin |
| Henry: | Jack Wibbe |
| John: | Peter Eichman |
| Geoffrey: | David Rusiecki |
| Richard: | Joshua Engel |
| Eleanor: | Jaki Demarest |
| Philip: | Brett Estey |

Saturday Nights:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Alais: | Elise Berg |
| Henry: | Jack Wibbe (11/3 and 11/10) Brett Estey (11/17) |
| John: | Lauren Zambreny |
| Geoffrey: | David Rusiecki (11/3&17) Jeff Hersh (11/10) |
| Richard: | Joshua Engel |
| Eleanor: | Jaki Demarest |
| Philip: | Jay Henry |

The Crew

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Directors: | Jaki Demarest Joshua Engel |
| Producer: | Jack Wibbe |
| Stage Managers: | Chenoa Jones Jeff Hersh |
| Fight Choreographer: | Jeff Hersh |
| Lighting Design: | Jack Wibbe |
| Lights: | Lauren Zambreny Peter Eichman |
| Sound: | Chenoa Jones |
| Set Design: | Jaki Demarest |
| Set Construction: | Joshua Engel Jaki Demarest Kristin Andersen Evan Haag |
| Costumes: | Jaki Demarest |

There will be one fifteen minute intermission.