



BWW Review: The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis Roars Mightily with Superb THE LION IN WINTER

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by Chris Gibson

Although I've seen the successful 1968 film version of THE LION IN WINTER, I'd never had the opportunity to watch the actual stage play which it's based upon, until now. Maybe it was the washed out prints that turned me off to it initially, but it's an absolute revelation to see The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis' superb production. What always seemed too stage bound and static in the film is vibrant and intense in person. Forget the movie and enjoy the brilliance of [James Goldman](#)'s script which is brimming with intensity and passion, and full of clever twists and turns. An excellent cast and expert direction make this must-see entertainment that demands your time and attention

The play is set in 1183, during Christmastime, and takes place in Henry II's castle in Chinon, France. The action begins with the arrival of his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, who he has kept imprisoned for the past 10 years. But, really the play is about the intrigue and interplay between Henry, Eleanor, and their three sons, along with their Christmas guest, the King of France. Of course, there's also the little matter of Alais, who's promised to their son Richard, but dallying with Henry himself. It's a complex soap opera that's completely spellbinding to watch unfold.

Jeffrey King fills King Henry II with a vitality that allows him to manipulate the others in extraordinary ways that always leave you guessing at what's coming next. Volatile, but cagey, King knows just when to roar. [Carol Schultz](#) is an especially formidable presence as Eleanor. She'll not go quietly, that's for certain. Kurt Hellerich does nice work as the young son, John, while [Wilson Bridges](#) shines as Geoffrey, the wheels

visibly turning in his head as he plots his next move. **Grayson DeJesus** is impressive as eldest son, Richard the Lionhearted, and projects a battle-tested exterior. Angela Janas draws considerable attention as the overlooked and underestimated Alais Capet, ratcheting up the tension with her own maneuvers. Ryan Zachary Ward neatly rounds out the cast as Philip Capet, the King of France, also a skilled gamesman, whose skills only seem to get better as time progresses.

Edward Stern's direction absolutely nails it! Even if you know what's coming next, you're still hanging on by a thread waiting for it to actually occur. And, there are a surprising amount of funny lines that really add to the overall atmosphere. Joseph Tilford's scenic design adds immeasurably to the proceedings, never intruding on the action, but accenting it instead. Mathew J. LeFebvre's costumes are very apt appointments for the times and the characters. **Thomas C. Hase provides a lighting scheme that nicely captures each moment**, and Rusty Wandall adds his usual, highly effective, sound design.

The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis' production of THE LION IN WINTER is not to be missed. This is another example of the company's superb skill at presenting classic works in engaging and refreshing fashion. The show continues through January 31, 2016 at the Loretto-Hilton.

Photo Credit: Lon Brauer