

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

VOL. CLVI . . No. 54,011

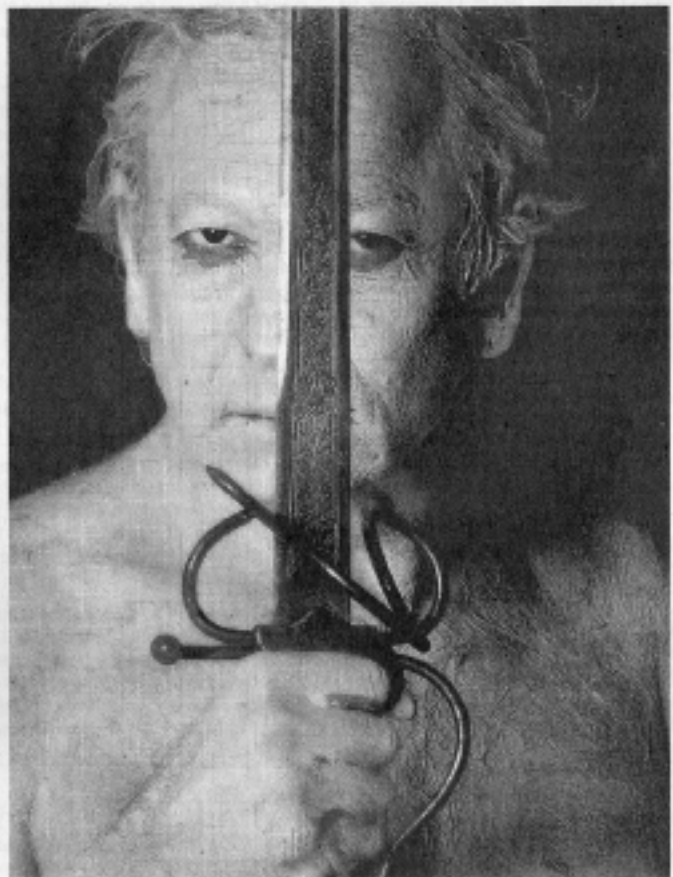
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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JULY 20, 2007

RICHARD III In the midst of its seventh season, Nicu's Spoon is doing something a lot of other small companies might envy: opening a show in its own theater. Shortly after signing an eight-year lease in April, the company is offering Shakespeare's "Richard III" at the newly named Spoon Theater. "Richard III," directed by Heidi Lauren Duke, is typical Nicu's Spoon fare, which means it is not at all typical. The company, run by its artistic director, Stephanie Barton-Farcas, attempts to challenge stereotypes by collaborating with artists from across the spectrum of ethnicities and abilities; a production of "Buried Child" last year featured a spoken performance by a deaf actor accustomed to performing in American Sign Language. In "Richard III," Henry Holden, right, is Shakespeare's villainous king who was "cheated of feature by dissembling nature" and, partly out of bitterness at his physical deformity, resorts to evil. In the mouth of Mr. Holden, who contracted polio in 1952 at 4 and walks with crutches, Richard's words take on a more particular

meaning, focusing the play directly and inescapably on the issue of disability. Nicu's Spoon has dedicated its entire current season to the theme of disability and will hold a panel discussion on July 31 called "Beyond Handicaps and Handouts: The New Face of Disability in the Arts." Panelists will include, among others, Ms. Barton-Farcas, Mr. Holden and Ike Shambelan, the co-artistic director of Theater by the Blind. Nicu's Spoon is also offering a summer reading series. Scheduled for Monday is "Identity," a semi-autobiographical piece by Nicholas Linnehan, a playwright with cerebral palsy. (Mr. Linnehan plays the lead role, too.) "Forgiveness of the Saints," a black comedy by Christian Gaul, is on Tuesday. ("Richard III" runs through July 29, Wednesday through Sunday at 8 p.m., Spoon Theater, 38 West 38th Street, fifth floor, Manhattan, 212-352-3101, theatermania.com; \$18. Information on the panel discussion, readings and fall productions is at spoontheater.org.)

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