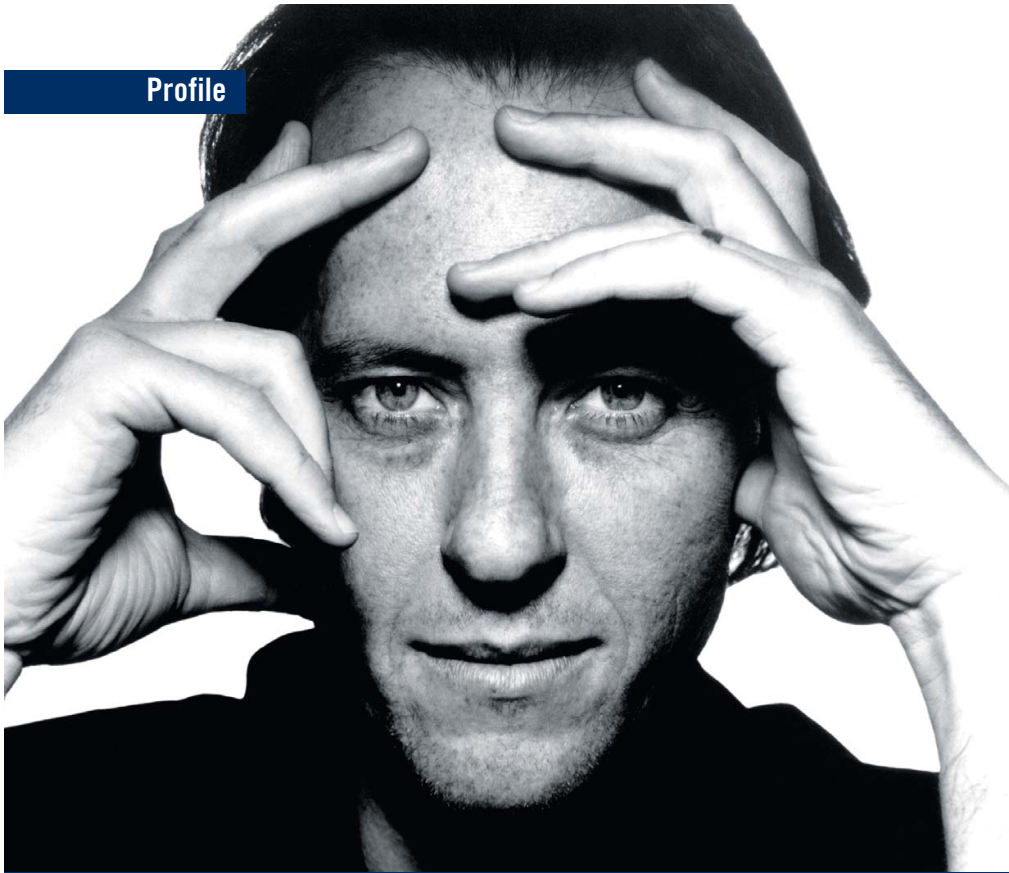


Profile



Middle Class Meltdown

Richard E. Grant pulls off the mask in *God of Carnage*

God of Carnage, a new play by Yasmina Reza, is poised to explode onto the stage and, as with her famous works, *Art* and *Life x 3*, reveal what we really are: predatory, vicious, savage and resentful. Translated from the French by Christopher Hampton, it's as much about British, middle-class society as anything can be. We are sure to recognise our friends and even - God forbid - ourselves.

Cool, handsome Richard E. Grant plays Alain, a cynical lawyer, married to Annette;

their son has broken two teeth of another boy in a playground fight, so they go to the house of the other parents to discuss it. Easy, surely? Grant explains. 'These four people start out in a civilised, middle class, caring-sharing way and soon become like the final scene in one of those wife-swap, reality TV programmes. You said this - no, you said that - and within a split second they are revealing what they really think of each other. I suppose the writer is saying this is what people are really

like - the God of Carnage does rule. It's Alain's creed in life; he believes that beneath the veneer of civilisation, we are all selfish, avaricious, self-obsessed and bestial. While the other characters are trying to show how civilised and politically correct they are, Alain doesn't even attempt that. If he's bored, he shows it; he tells it like it is. He has a kind of ruthless, horrible power, which is interesting to play. As appalling as he is, there's something admirable about him because

he is brutally honest and he has a laser-like, unvarnished view of human beings and how they operate.'

Richard E. Grant has an enviable CV. His acting career launched in 1987 with the cult *Withnail and I* and over the next 20 years he appeared in 60 films including *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *Jack and Sarah*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, *Gosford Park* and *Bright Young Things*. He is a much respected stage actor, very popular in TV drama and regularly in demand for

three hours long. In the speeded-up age we live in, I'm grateful for brevity in the theatre and in the movies - rather than epic bum-ache! This is perfect. It's very claustrophobic in that you're in one room the whole time - and the confrontation unfolds relentlessly.'

Grant is a respected writer. He penned a fascinating memoir of the filming of *Withnail and I*, and he wrote and directed the 2005 film *Wah-Wah*, based on his childhood experiences in Swaziland. The experience was later published in diary form

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voiceover work and audio books. He can pick and choose his roles, so what drew him to this production? 'I saw the play in the West End last summer, and I thought it was very funny, so when I was offered it, it seemed a great opportunity - and I'd never worked with the director, Matthew Warchus before. Also I liked the fact that it's not over

and was much praised by critics for its honesty. Does he enjoy the diversity of writing, acting and directing? 'Yes. They all feed into each other. What you're dealing with is trying to create characters - show human life. I've been an actor for so long, it informs how I write and how I direct. It's a huge advantage, I think.'

As a writer and an actor, he must study human nature. Is he a watcher of people? He laughs, 'Well, I'm a nosy parker, let's put it that way. I'm very curious about why people do things. I still don't fully understand the public fascination with actors' lives, with celebrity - but I think it might be because we are all required to act in some way during our lives - as parents, as lovers - and we're interested in how it works.'

If drama is real life with the boring bits taken out, then *Big Brother* is the opposite - the boring bits dominant. Richard laughs: 'It's better to watch the highlights programme, then you're spared some of that.' But it still isn't good drama is it? 'Oh no, I have to disagree with you there. I think Sylvester Stallone's mother gave a performance that was historic and memorable. Anthea Turner discussing the colour of her food-warmer - these are moments I will never forget. Golden moments. Not for them, of course - dreadful for them - but fascinating for the viewers.'

No point then, in asking if this quiet, private man would ever be lured into the Big Brother house? Would he? 'I'll give you a guess,' he smiles.



God of Carnage

Starring Richard E. Grant, Lia Williams and Paul Ritter

Richmond Theatre
9 - 14 Mar 2009
Box Office 0870 060 6651

Theatre Royal, Brighton
16 - 21 Mar 2009
Box Office 08700 606 650

Milton Keynes Theatre
24 - 28 Mar 2009
Box Office 0870 060 6652

Online booking at
AmbassadorTickets.com