

Berkshire Theatre Group, Pittsfield, MA

Dracula, by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston . Based on the novel by Bram Stoker.
Directed by David Auburn. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

"I must be master here or I can do nothing."

If the name Professor Van Helsing was the name of this play it would be appropriate. It would be uninspiring, but it would be right. If ever a play belonged to a single character it is this one from 1927, a classic melodrama based on an historic novel. It introduced a Hungarian actor to Broadway, to America, named Bela Lugosi who went on to star in the film version and continue with the title character for a productive career. But while *Dracula* is the focus of the play it is Van Helsing who moves the play along, who plays the strongest role and who makes the play into a living, beathing entity. The Berkshire Theatre Group, presenting the play at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, has chosen a woman to play Van Helsing, a first for me. Jennifer Van Dyck, who has swiftly become one of my favorite players, takes the role and she not only makes it her own, she changes my perspective on the play's true dynamics. She is brilliant, moving, effective and so very, very real that I almost shudder at the thought of ever meeting her in an alley somewhere. In spite of other fine performances in this production Van Dyck is what the play is about. And it's about time.



David Adkins, Matt Sullivan, Nome SiDone, Emma Geer, Jennifer VanDyke;
Photo: Emma K. Rothenberg-Ware

One brilliant performance does not make a play, however, and she has incredible support

from an excellent company. Her companion in science, Dr. Seward is played by the incomparable David Adkins who wrenches your heart with his impassioned pleas for his daughter Lucy played with a beautiful sensitivity by Emma Geer. Renfield, the madman patient is played with unexpected nuance by Matt Sullivan who gives the man back his soul by playing him so well.



Mitchell Winter; Photo: Jacey Rae Russell

Count Dracula, the man of the title, is played with unusual subtlety by handsome Mitchell Winter who brings a certain grace to the character. Butterworth, the attendant, is given a light and humorous interpretation by Brian Thomas Abraham and his young love, the maid Miss Wells is nicely played by Jessica Ko. Jonathan Harker, Lucy's fiancé, is played by Nome SiDone who was a bit of a mush-mouth making his lines unintelligible.

Director David Auburn interpolated one additional character referred to in the script, the woman in white, a creature created by Dracula in London prior to the action of this play. She is played by Rubielle Nejaime and her

appearances gave the play a deeper dimension as we began to realize that this vision was the future of Lucy Seward if things could not be reversed.

Auburn does well with the human relationships in this play. There are no false moments between characters; it is all played for the realities contained in the script. This makes the scarier moments seem that much more real. It is a job well done for a play that is often abused.

In three acts the play has been well conceived by scenic designer Bill Clarke with excellent costumes created by Hunter Kaczorowski. The very moody lighting was designed by Daniel J. Kotkowitz and the sound by resident composer Scott Killian was most effective. Kotlowirz also designed the fine projections used throughout the play.



David Adkins, Emma Geer;
Photo: Emma K. Rothenberg-Ware

“Dracula” isn’t produced very often any longer. It is assumed to be too silly a piece to be seen, but David Auburn proves that to be a ridiculous argument against an excellent adaptation of a historic horror novel. Originally it inspired an entire genre of theatre which the movies stole and made their own, but rarely as seriously as this production does with the play. We have a unique opportunity to step back in time and witness for ourselves how effective this can be when done seriously without a tongue in a cheek anywhere. And, as said, we have the additional thrill of a female Van Helsing, perhaps the way it should always have been. Take a chance on vampirism and see this play.

+ 08/14/2022 +

Dracula plays at the Colonial Theater, 111 South Street, Pittsfield, MA through August 27. For information and tickets call 413-997-4444 or go to www.berkshiretheatregroup.org.