

‘Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors’ is hilarious, with plenty of heart

The play delivers a steady stream of madcap comedy, but within the heart of the story, are some deeper, meaningful themes that look at feminism and gender roles, family ties, devotion and true acceptance.

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Luke Sholl & Mark S. Cartier in *Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors*

There is certainly nothing funny about a centuries old vampire feasting on the blood of innocent, unsuspecting humans. Or is there?

The performance of “Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors” at The Public Theatre in Lewiston is a hilarious, Python-esque take on Bram Stoker’s classic tale. In the introductory scene, the audience is assured that the show will cover the basic themes of the story: “life, death, and a hot guy who takes off his shirt!”

Directed by Janet Mitchko, the ensemble cast of five versatile actors leaves the audience in stitches as Count Dracula (Luke Sholl) pursues the beautiful and adventurous Lucy (Jessica DiGiovanni) who is engaged to the sweet but diffident real estate agent Jonathan Harker (Ian Gould). Meanwhile, Lucy’s plain and awkward sister Mina (Kevin Cristaldi) longs for the attention of a man, along with the elusive approval of her and Lucy’s father, Dr. Westfeldt (Mark S. Cartier). The five cast members portray dozens of wacky characters in this unique and hilarious retelling of the famous story.

Actor One portrays the nerdy and timid, yet charming and likable character of Jonathan Harker, played by Ian Gould. While the character meets the stereotype of the Type A, gluten-free, sweater vest-wearing geek, Gould portrays him with charm and humor. As the show progresses, we realize a surprising level of courage and strength within his docile personality.

Actor Two in this stellar cast is Mark S. Cartier as Dr. Westfeldt, Lucy and Mina’s flawed, but loving father and head of the local insane asylum who proudly employs his patients as his household help. Cartier does an amazing job of portraying Dr. Westfeldt as a loving, but not entirely equitable, father and an understanding, compassionate doctor, all while delivering a strong dose of zany humor.

Actor Three, Jessica DiGiovanni, portrays Lucy Westfeldt, a strong, loving and capable character with just the right amount of humor thrown in. Lucy is a faithful fiancée, a loyal daughter and a truly devoted sister. However, even she is not immune to Dracula’s charms. DiGiovanni is able to capture the character’s strength and depth while still being laugh out loud funny.

Actor Four portrays Dr. Van Helsing and Mina Westfeldt. Both are played in a hilarious gender-bending fashion by Kevin Cristaldi. Mina, living in her sister's shadow and desperate for love, becomes an easy yet amusing victim. Van Helsing, on the other hand, is strong and assertive. Thanks to Cristaldi's wit, comic timing, and versatility, both roles are performed to perfection.

Actor Five, Luke Scholl does an incredible job of portraying Dracula as the intimidating, larger than life vampire, who makes a spectacular entrance, making it clear that he never misses a workout. Dracula also has a sweet and considerate side. In addition to his thirst for blood, Dracula enjoys baking and is even sensitive to the dietary needs of others. He also shows off some impressive dance moves. Scholl portrays Dracula with enough charm and humor that it becomes easy to overlook the vampire's murderous transgressions and simply be entertained by all that he has to offer.

Adding to the humor are the many pop culture references woven throughout the story. Whether you are familiar with science fiction, British comedy, American sitcoms or even album covers from the 60s, the references, and the laughs, are non-stop.

While "Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors" delivers a steady stream of madcap comedy, within the heart of the story, are some deeper, meaningful themes. It takes a look at feminism and gender roles, family ties, devotion and true acceptance. We see characters find inner strength and courage they never knew they had and we even get a glimpse of genuine good amid the evil.

"Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors" was written by Gordon Greenburg and Steve Rosen. Greenburg is a director and actor both on and off Broadway and Rosen is an actor and comedy writer in New York City.

Upcoming performances are scheduled for Oct. 17 through 27. Times are Thursday and Friday at 7 p.m., Saturday at 3 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m. Performances on Saturday, Oct. 19, will be held at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$35 for adults, \$30 each for groups of 10 or more, \$15 for youth ages 13-18.

The Public Theatre is at 31 Maple St. in Lewiston. For more information or tickets call (207) 782-3200 or go to thepublictheatre.org.