

Public Theatre takes ‘Misery’ to a new level

Jon Bolduc
Special to the Sun Journal
Oct 28, 2025

The Lewiston theater’s adaption of Stephen King’s bestseller shines with ‘astounding’ performances and New York quality set design.



Annie Wilkes, left, played by Teri Clark Linden, “encourages” novelist Paul Sheldon, played by Torsten Hillhouse, in The Public Theatre’s current production of Stephen King’s “Misery.”

Stephen King is famous for his monsters: the killer clown Pennywise, the murderous Plymouth Fury Christine, and, of course, the obsessed and deranged nurse Annie Wilkes, to name a few.

But The Public Theatre’s own take on the classic King psychological thriller “Misery” also offers a believable, cinematic, and harrowing telling of the bestseller, smack in the middle of the Halloween season to boot.

“Misery” is a high-octane experience and technical marvel that centers around a familiar story, at least for fans of King.

In playwright William Goldman’s 1990 adaptation, the center of the narrative does not change. Paul Sheldon, a famous writer coming off a failed marriage and fresh with a new manuscript, crashes his car in a snowy wreck and is “rescued” by his self-described “No. 1 fan,” Annie Wilkes. A tale of obsession, torture, and, well ... misery abounds. With outstanding acting and some unexpected moments of humor to add to — or relieve — the scenes.

Misery is a prevalent emotion in the story: Paul Sheldon, played by Torsten Hillhouse, is, of course, physically miserable, and Hillhouse does an excellent job portraying Sheldon as he literally drags his broken body across the floor. Hillhouse spends a considerable amount of time bedbound, and his portrayal of Paul’s desperation as he is rendered immobile to the whims of Annie is disturbing in the best way.

Annie, of course, is the central monster of the story, and Teri Clark Linden’s portrayal of Wilkes is unique from some of the more culturally ubiquitous portrayals. Whereas Kathy Bates may have been cerebral, plotting, and sinister in the Oscar-winning movie version, Linden plays Wilkes with a kind of unbridled mania that keeps Paul (and the audience) constantly on unstable footing.

There’s a particular scene that Linden plays absolutely masterfully — pacing, launching off into a frenzied monologue about fairness, and jumping on top of the bed — that drew a round of applause from the house.

Much of her performance is astounding. Linden’s whiplash is scary: The audience never quite knows if she is the quirky, funny, likable Annie or the Annie that snaps and causes great bodily harm.

Daniel Rennie also deserves a shoutout for his role as the small-town sheriff Buster. His building suspicion and sudden conclusion brought an element of shock that truly raised the stakes of the narrative.

The production offered a couple unexpected lapses for this reviewer. Several times, it was unclear if a line was meant to shock or for humor. And for my money, the stage combat could have been drawn out.

But these are minor criticisms. The end result is a tense, physically unnerving, and poignant story of obsession and survival.

The show is an absolute technical marvel. I am not exaggerating when stating this is truly professional quality set design brought to Maine. Michael Reidy, the set designer, built a rotating set that is used to create cinematic moments onstage you would expect from a New York playhouse.

There were also some really nice sound and lighting design choices from Stephen Petrilli and Sean McGinley. It's proof that The Public Theatre is continually raising the bar for what Maine theater can accomplish.

If you're looking for an evening of thrilling entertainment during this spooky season, consider an evening spent with — not in — “Misery” at The Public Theatre. The show runs Oct. 30-Nov. 2 and Nov. 6-9, with performances on Thursdays and Fridays at 7 p.m., Saturdays at 3 p.m. (with an additional 7:30 p.m. show on Nov. 1), and Sundays at 2 p.m.