

Gothic 'Dracula' horror opens at Blackfriars on Halloween

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(Photo: Dave Weisbrod)

A dark tale of a gothic lust for power promises to suck in theater lovers on Halloween night and beyond at Blackfriars Theatre.

The creepy classic *Dracula* promises to present more than blood-sucking fangs in a performance by actor Darren Stevenson and cast.

“People are loving it,” said Stevenson about audience reactions thus far. “It’s a bit of an emotional roller coaster. One audience member said that she couldn’t believe she went from crying to shaking with fear all in just a few moments. I’ve seen the fear in the audiences’ eyes and have felt that they’re in our world.”

Although the show opens in Rochester on Halloween, Blackfriars is one stop on a national tour of the show that began in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, on Oct. 13 and ends in Waynesboro, Virginia, on Feb. 10.

Dracula is not a jump-scare type of production, but it can still be quite terrifying, since it plays on themes like mental illness, rage, vengeance and lust for power above all else. There is no blood, gore, nudity, coarse language or sex, but there is a fair amount of stylized violence and terror.



Actors in the *Dracula* stage performance. The show opens Oct. 31 at Blackfriars Theatre. (Photo: Dave Weisbrod)

This is not to say there are not light moments, but the show is not a comedy by any means.

“With gothic horror there’s always these moments of levity, lightness and comedy,” Hoskins said. “A lot of the lighter moments are the romantic moments that balance the horror.”

The show’s appropriateness for children should be decided by parents on an individual basis.

If it were rated, it might be a PG-13, [says a highly detailed and helpful note to parents and teachers](http://pushtheatre.org/dracula/pdf/DRACULAParentsTeachers.pdf) (<http://pushtheatre.org/dracula/pdf/DRACULAParentsTeachers.pdf>) from Stevenson and his wife, Heather Stevenson. Both are co-founding artistic directors for PUSH Physical Theatre.

The performance



Dracula premieres on Halloween night at Blackfriars Theatre. (Photo: Dave Weisbrod)

The monster takes the stage Oct. 31 through Nov. 12 as Blackfriars Theatre and PUSH Physical Theatre present the show at the Blackfriars Theatre on East Main Street.

Every two years, Rochester theatrical powerhouses team up to produce an original show. This year’s loosely based rendition of Bram Stoker’s 1897 Gothic masterpiece *Dracula* is a greatly expanded and reworked rendition of a show they first premiered in workshop form in 2009 at Geva Theatre.

More: [PUSH collaboration on 'Dracula' highlights Blackfriars season](http://story/news/2017/04/03/musicals-shakespeare-push-collaboration-blackfriars/99983596/)

“Even if you saw the show in 2009, it’s an entirely new, richer experience,” said Danny Hoskins, the show’s writer and Blackfriars’ artistic and managing director. “There are a number of storytelling components that are different from 2009 and a huge amount of new choreography.”

The show is an hour longer than the original and utilizes a variety of theatrical disciplines including acting, mime, modern dance and acrobatic partnering to tell the *Dracula* story.



'Dracula Flies' by Angela Johnson (Photo: Angela Johnson)

Traditional, spoken dialogue is only used in about a quarter of the show and, in fact, Stevenson does not speak (there is some voice-over for the Dracula character done by Jonathan Ntheketha).

Renfield, an inmate in an insane asylum, is the only speaking character on stage and is played by Rick Staropoli.

"The story is told through his eyes," Hoskins said. "It's the same classic story that we all know, but it's told through a different character, journey and medium."

Set pieces are minimal. Instead, PUSH Physical Theatre actors transform their bodies into a multitude of objects, including tables, chairs and lamps and less tangible pieces too, like twisted minds.



'The Trap' image is a part of Dracula showing at Blackfriars beginning Tuesday, Oct. 31. (Photo: Angela Johnson)

"We play all the set pieces and props ourselves," Stevenson said. "When this is done well it has a cinematic quality where we become a new environment."

Stevens hit the gym months early in order to properly portray the *Dracula* character: "I wanted the monster to look lean, hungry and powerful," says Stevenson.

Caurie Putnam is West Extra columnist and a freelance writer in the Rochester area.



'Dracula' features Darren and Heather Stevenson, pictured. (Photo: Angela Johnson)

If You Go

What: Dracula performances by PUSH Physical Theatre.

When: 7:30 p.m. Oct. 31, Nov. 1, 2, 8 and 9; 2 p.m. Nov. 5 and 12; 7 p.m. Nov. 4; 8 p.m. Nov. 3, 10 and 11. Opening night's Halloween performance will feature a "Come as your favorite vampire" costume contest with prizes.

Where: Blackfriars Theatre, 795 E. Main St.

Cost: \$36.50 to \$39.50. Tickets are available in person at the theater box office (10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday), online or by phone. Senior and student discounts are available. If available, tickets can be purchased at the door beginning one hour prior to performance.

More: Call (585) 454-1260, or visit www.blackfriars.org (<http://blackfriars.org>).

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