

THE CLASSIC TALE OF
SEDUCTION, DESIRE AND
MADNESS TOLD AS YOU'VE
NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE

pu
sh.

[physical theatre]

DRACULA

“...mesmerizingly seductive...”

“...gorgeous visuals...”

“...brilliant.”

– City Newspaper

SAVE
-THE-
DATE

FOR HALLOWEEN & VALENTINES
SEE THE VIDEO AND FIND OUT MORE AT
PUSHTHEATRE.ORG





THE ACROBATIC SPECTACLE FROM THE MASTERS OF MOTION THEATRE

photo: Angela Johnson

The acrobatic spectacle from the masters of motion theatre: PUSH Physical Theatre's adaptation of Bram Stoker's 1897 horror novel, *Dracula*, is like nothing audiences have ever seen. With the addition of respected Rochester writer, Danny Hoskins, *PUSH Physical Theatre's DRACULA* is not only an experiment in true collaboration, but a daring departure from the award-winning company's usual 'silent treatment.' By combining PUSH's speechless artistry with traditional dialogue-driven theatre, the collaborators have created a ground-breaking, thrilling and unforgettable ride into the warped world of one of literature's most famous villains.

In his hunt for immortality, Renfield stumbles upon the Amulet of the Vampir, a lost jewel buried in the legend of Dracula, The Master. Caged in a cell and under the watchful eye of The Doctor, Renfield uncovers the secrets of eternal life as a mysterious Maiden arrives at the asylum. As the ties that bind the living and the dead begin to unravel, the lines between heroes and the devil begin to blur.

PUSH plays it all, from Renfield – the tortured soul from whose point of view the classic story of seduction, desire and madness is told – to the incomparable Darren Stevenson as Dracula himself. They transform into all of the set pieces: tables, chairs, lamps...even bringing to life the impossible imaginings of twisted minds. Stunning lighting, interactive video projection and sound design complete the spellbinding, cinematic-like masterpiece.

"To watch (PUSH) writhe in a squirming mass to the eerie music of 'Dead Can Dance' rendered the orgy scenes in HBO's popular True Blood squalid and uninspired in comparison."

– Casey Carlson,
City Newspaper

PUSH Physical Theatre's DRACULA began – as all of PUSH's work does – with guided improvisation. The following months of collaborative exploration resulted in a 10-minute "trailer" during PUSH's May, 2009 run at the prestigious Geva Theatre Center in Rochester, NY. Two workshop performances of *DRACULA* followed during Geva's "What's Next: Festival of New Theatre" in June, 2009. The piece made its world premiere at Geva in October of 2009 to rave reviews and sold-out crowds.



On Creating Dracula

It was only during the second week of performing the title role in DRACULA that I realized what, for me, the play was about. I had thought that I knew already, of course. My first trip to the theatre at 10 years old was to see *Dracula* at The Theatre Royal in Plymouth, England. I was terrified and completely absorbed by the magic of the play. The illusion had such a massive effect on me that the experience lived on into adulthood. PUSH's DRACULA asks questions about life and death, spirituality, sexuality and moral absolutes. It's about the nature of fear. I'm an adult, I don't believe in ghosts, and I'm educated enough to know that, statistically, the chances of anything human or animal attacking me are pretty slim. But still, when I walk in the woods at night, I'm gripped by that knot in the pit of my stomach and panic rises, threatening to overtake me. My emotions don't care what my brain knows. What if there was an abso-

lutely evil entity? The vampire...Dracula. Does it matter whether you believe or not? Does he care?

When I first heard the music for Dracula's seduction of The Woman, I thought our Sound Designer Dan Roach had missed by a mile.

"This is all wrong," I said. "This sounds too romantic. Dracula is evil; he only wants to kill."

I'm very glad Dan disagreed with me. As often happens when you work with such talented people, I ended up trusting Dan's instincts over my own. Even though I was sure he was wrong, we went with his selection. So, during that second week of performances, as I listened to the music while playing the seduction (with my real-life wife and partner, Heather Stevenson), it hit me: Dracula thinks he's in love! That's the tragedy here. As an actor you have to have some connection to the character you're playing, some glimmer of empathy no matter how reprehensible he may be. But I'd made the

rookie mistake of approaching the part as a two-dimensional representation of evil – all clever movement tricks and physicality.

The line between love and obsession is difficult to detect when you're in one or the other. The great love songs say, "I need you." If I really love, though, can I let go? Or, do I need that person so desperately that I'm willing to ruin her in order to have her? In PUSH's *Dracula*, The Man lives, in counterpoint to Dracula, with the one goal that overrides everything else: to serve The Woman. Dracula's desire is rapacious, cannibalistic. He needs only to consume. Which leaves us with Renfield. Does he choose love or obsession? What to do? Well now, there's the play.

– Darren Stevenson

"The PUSH Physical Theatre adaptation of Bram Stoker's Dracula juxtaposes the beauty of the best within human beings with our profound fear that we will succumb to the temptation of evil. In so doing, it creates an audience experience quite unlike anything you have probably seen before."

– Debra Ross, *Kids Out and About*



photo: Angela Johnson

Danny Hoskins

DANNY HOSKINS (*Writer/Renfield in Dracula*) is an actor, director, teacher and playwright. A Rochester native, he has worked regionally as an actor at the Hartford Stage Company, Alliance Theatre Company, Festival Theatre of St. Croix, Trustus Theatre and The Wings Theatre in NYC.

Mr. Hoskins has toured nationally with his one man show, *The Hamlet Project*, and internationally in London and Sibiu, Romania (Sibiu International Theatre Festival) with a company he co-founded, Pineapple Productions. As a director, he's mounted productions of *Take Me Out*, *Misery*, *The Pillowman*, *Children of Eden* and *Speed the Plow*. Since returning to Rochester, Mr. Hoskins has performed with Blackfriars

Theatre, JCC CenterStage, PUSH Physical Theatre and Rochester Children's Theatre. He serves on the Board of Directors at Blackfriars Theatre, as a performance educator for Teaching and Training by Design, a theatre-based corporate training firm, and teaches acting at both SUNY Brockport and the University of Rochester. As a playwright, he has penned two original pieces, *The Yukan Duit Murder Mystery* and *The Year Santa Forgot Christmas*, both having their world premieres at Elmira College in Elmira, NY in 2005. His musical, *Raise Your Sword*, received its debut workshop production at JCC Centerstage in 2008 and another of his adaptations, *Dracula*, received its world premiere at Geva Theatre Center with PUSH Physical Theatre in 2009. Mr. Hoskins holds an MFA from the University of South Carolina.

On Writing *Dracula* for PUSH

How do you write a play for a group of performers who don't use dialogue? Who excel in an art form where the beauty and strength of their storytelling resides in their physical exploration of emotion, characterization, and invention? Why put words in the mouth of a mime? All of these extremely valid and important questions came to mind after I had said to Darren, "Yes! I would love to collaborate and write a play with you!" Exactly. You may laugh, but I went home and banged my head on my desk for a week. What came next, though, has been one of the most exciting, challenging, and fulfilling artistic journeys I've ever experienced.

And it was spawned from those very questions. How do you and why would you tell a story in this manner? This brings up one of the most intriguing aspects of being an artist: playing detective. You are charged with the goal – to tell a good story – and it is up to you and your fellow artists to figure out how to achieve that goal with the tools you have at your behest. In this case, we had all the best tools of dialogue-driven theater and mimetic and physical theatre, so how could we go wrong? But the challenge quickly became clear: how to combine them in a way that harnessed the strengths and theatricality of each while creating a symbiotic storytelling experience and not alienating either discipline from one another.

As we pondered the content issues, the storytelling devices, how to stay true to a classic tale and iconic images, where to break away and dive into originality and invention, we always were coming back to the issues around our two schools of theatre: physical/mimetic and dialogue/character-driven theatre. And as we all worked our way through this challenge, I believe we have created something quite original, something quite striking and hopefully – what is at the heart of all good storytelling – something engaging, challenging and moving for you, the audience, to behold.

I know it's something I've never experienced before and it's something that has made me a better artist, a better collaborator, and a better storyteller. We all are familiar with the tale of *Dracula*, with a tale of love and fear and the draw of eternal life, but I hope that the story that unfolds before you tonight will not only provide what all good stories do, but will also open you up to something you've never seen before. A new way to hear, to see, to experience what we always come to the theatre to enjoy: a good story.

– Danny Hoskins



photos: Dave Weisbrod



A scene from PUSH Physical Theatre's "Dracula," on stage now at Geva. PHOTO PROVIDED

Bleeding love

Dracula

BY PUSH PHYSICAL THEATRE
THROUGH NOVEMBER 8
GEVA THEATRE CENTER,
75 WOODBURY BLVD.
\$20 | 232-4382, GEVATHEATRE.ORG

[REVIEW] BY CASEY CARLSEN

Look out Lestat. Beware Edward Cullen and Bill Compton. A vampire rival has emerged, and he's gliding across the floorboards of Geva Theatre, fanged bared.

As *Dracula*, the prototype for all of today's young vampiric upstarts, Darren Stevenson of PUSH Physical Theatre bestows his considerable gift for movement upon Vlad, imbuing him with a mesmerizingly seductive grace. Long fingers trail slowly down a bare arm, edged closely by searing ferocity — the classic lunge and plunge (complete with mashing, crushing sounds by Dan Roach, whose sound design talents heighten the show's cringe factor).

I've seen *Dracula's* story done as pure ballet, and the form serves the legend well. But PUSH combines dance with theater in its production, supplementing the gorgeous visuals (where does Stevenson get his chest waxed?) with a spoken narrative that pulls the audience more deeply

into the story, although not without some confusion. Less might have been more.

Local actor and playwright Danny Hoskins scripted the dialogue, and gives a solid performance as the tortured Renfield, mainly ranting in his downstage "cell," cleverly construed with bars of shadow falling across the floor in a square. Hoskins's script helps set a Gothic mood with the flowery pronouncements we hear as voiceover ("In the chill of the night, the dead travel fast"), and charts Renfield's progression into madness with his paranoid babble ("Red rover, red rover, send the promised food over"). It was a delight to watch Hoskins pluck fiery, red-lit, buzzing flies from the air and see their light doused as he seemingly, through a bit of theatrical magic, popped them furtively into his mouth.

But the antics of the children of the night were even greater eye candy. To watch them writhe in a squirming mass to the eerie music of *Dead Can Dance* rendered the orgy scenes in HBO's popular "True Blood" squalid and uninspired in comparison.

Stevenson gives us an unorthodox and highly finessed interpretation of the title character. From his first appearance, hanging curled from a ring suspended above the stage, bathed in a sinister red light, he commands our attention. He unfurls upside down, bat-like, then arches his rippling torso up and

outwards toward the audience, snarling and grimacing, and we are immediately convinced of his otherworldliness.

PUSH is at its best delivering such spectacle. More gasps came later when Stevenson rises, magnificent cape spread wide, from the writhing heap of his consorts as a clock chimes offstage. Fangs bared menacingly, he nearly floats towards the audience, utilizing a seamless, slow-motion glide before veering sharply sideways.

Lucy is portrayed by Stevenson's wife and PUSH partner, Heather Stevenson, who adeptly expresses both the initial innocence of her character and her frenzied loss of self as she falls victim to Dracula's lustful thirst. The Stevensons move together with an easy familiarity, which gives their work a supreme confidence, yet works somewhat against them by leaching some of the dramatic tension from their characters' interchanges.

Additionally, I sometimes struggled to discern Lucy from the others onstage; Johanna Bystrom's costuming could have been more inspired. While Dracula's stature alone rendered him unmistakable, he also had *The Cape*. Lucy's pale gauzy skirt did not readily distinguish her from the other vampiric women (played by Bystrom and Christine Prewitt). I wanted to take Lucy by the hand and lead her down to Godiva's to pluck through the racks of Gothic attire and unearth a striking gown. Perhaps a scarlet, crushed velvet dress with the plunging neckline? Necessary freedom of movement and cost restrictions may have been overriding factors in the costume choices, but still, a girl wants to look, well, irresistible.

The lighting, however, was brilliant. Besides the devilish sheen of pinkish-red transporting us to the realm of the vampyre, I particularly liked the sickly yellow-greenish hue cast over Lucy as she struggled for life on her sick bed, and over Renfield as he succumbed to insanity in his cell. Excellent use was made of shadow, too, as silhouettes lengthened threateningly along the wall or across the floor.

Speaking of beds, no props were needed for furniture since beds, desks, and chairs were skillfully formed by the bodies of the performers themselves. This added nuance to the set, especially sinister touches like a desk lamp (a.k.a. the arm of Dracula) transforming into a grasping claw.

Isaac Carter and Jonathan Lowery round out the cast of "Dracula," which is actually only the second half of PUSH's current production. The first half gives the audience the chance to see some of PUSH's trademark pieces such as "Galileo" and "The Visit," neither of which should be missed. Heather Stevenson's amazing portrayal of a Parkinson's patient in "The Visit" gave me the shivers, and drew sad sniffles from my neighbor. These are powerful performers.

Theater review: 'Dracula' at Blackfriars

By Leah Stacy @leahstacy

Although Christmas decorations quickly replaced any remnants of Halloween in stores, a large harvest moon hangs low in the sky and the weather has just begun the transition from temperate to bone chilling. With the opening of its **second 2017-18 season production**, "Dracula," on Halloween, Blackfriars Theatre isn't in a rush to move past the season.

"Dracula," which runs through November 12, is a collaboration between Blackfriars and **PUSH Physical Theatre**, an award-winning troupe that mixes dance with movement and mime to create performance art. Blackfriars Artistic Director Danny Hoskins has created a few other shows with PUSH over the last decade, including a retelling of "**Jekyll and Hyde**" during the 2015-16 season. "Dracula" is a reprisal of an adaptation performed at Geva Theatre Center in 2009 (then, Hoskins played Renfield).

The two-hour show, written for the stage by Hoskins, completely reimagines Bram Stoker's classic 1897 novel in ways countless past film and stage adaptations have not. In addition to making more of Renfield's and Dracula's backstories and changing all the other character names to vague monikers -- such as "The Man," "The Maiden," and "The Chosen One" -- the entire narrative in this version is told with voiceover and movement. Because there's still a lot of plot to get through even with these simplifications, video projections and an elaborate web of sound and music cues help drive the narrative forward.

Interestingly, the PUSH founders -- and husband and wife team -- Darren and Heather Stevenson co-direct the production with both Hoskins and Virginia Monte of **WallByrd Theatre Co.** Monte was brought in both for fresh perspective and for her design chops, specifically when it comes to costumes and props. (It's worth noting that she also worked on a different workshop version of "Dracula" during the **2016 Rochester Fringe Festival**.) And while four co-directors may seem like overkill, there was no sense of micromanagement at any point during "Dracula."

The six-person PUSH team is a wonder. Not only is each member a stunning mime, dancer, and performer, but each one has a firm grasp on stage presence. PUSH recently finished touring a version of "Dracula" throughout the United States over the last month, and their deep connection to the production is apparent. There is no low energy, no weakest link, and no lack of passion; rather, PUSH moves as one pulsing unit, supporting and spotlighting one another throughout the performance.

Rick Staropoli, who previously appeared in "**Death of a Salesman**" (as Howard) and "**Annapurna**" (Ulysses), plays the manic Renfield to perfection, showing each step of the professor's rapid unraveling into madness. He is the only non-PUSHer in the show, and consequently, the only actor onstage who has a speaking role. Staropoli makes a valiant effort with movement, but he's not a dancer -- the most impressive part about his role is that much of it feels like a one-man show (and not in a scene-stealing fashion, but in a strong-enough-to-carry-it way).

The other characters are portrayed through movement and voiceover only, which means some of the greatest roles in the show are those the audience never sees. This is especially true of the Voice of Dracula, played by Jonathan Ntheketha, a local actor and Rochester Institute of Technology staffer. Ntheketha's command of Dracula's authority and menacing timbre are truly chilling, and in turn empower Darren Stevenson's intensity and stage presence in the physical role.

The staging, costumes, and technical aspects of the show are all tailored to an experience that's non-traditional for most theatregoers; this is a show that concentrates on physical artists rather than actors and a minimal set design bursting with video clips, sound effects, and lighting cues. Sound, especially, is crucial to the production's success, and designer Dan Roach -- who also designed the projections -- has done a spectacular job creating the world of "Dracula." In the booth, DJ Stevenson has the important task of hitting every video and sound cue, and he does so without a hitch. But over and over again, the audience will have to suspend expectation and give in to imagination. The dancers become desks, coat hooks, and armchairs. Windows are magically created from shadow and light. Blood is intimated through sound effects.

The only odd moment in the show was during a dance between The Man (Avi Pryntz-Nadworthy) and The Maiden (Heather Stevenson) set to "Can't Help Falling in Love" in the first act. Most of the other songs aren't recognizable and don't have lyrics, so the song seemed out of place and the scene clunky, overall. In act two, a similar scene -- this time between Dracula and The Maiden -- takes place, but this time the music is more thematic, and the scene between the two, who have such a powerful chemistry, is gripping.

Since the administration of Hoskins and Development Manager Mary Tiballi Hoffman began at Blackfriars Theatre, there has been a noticeable turn in the type of theater performed at the space - under Hoskins, the seasons have felt more cutting edge. "Dracula," with all its experimentation, collaboration, and technical bells and whistles, is a testament to that turn.



click to enlarge
PHOTO BY ANGELA JOHNSON
Darren Stevenson as the terrifying Dracula in a collaborative production between PUSH Physical Theatre and Blackfriars.

"Dracula"

Reviewed Thursday,
November 2

Continues Wednesday,
November 8, through
Sunday, November 12

Blackfriars Theatre, 795
East Main Street

7:30 p.m. Wednesday and
Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday
and Saturday; 2 p.m.
Sunday

\$39.50 general; \$36.50
seniors; \$20 students |
blackfriars.org

High-flying 'Dracula' takes terror to new heights in Sands Point

PUSH Physical Theatre retells the classic tale through dance inspired by Bram Stoker's 1897 novel.



PUSH Physical Theatre artistic director Darren Stevenson portrays Count Dracula in the acrobatic adaptation. Photo Credit: Dave Weisbrod

By Jim Merritt

Special to Newsday

Updated October 8, 2018 4:30 PM

Like any Dracula production worth its fangs, the new version of Bram Stoker's classic horror tale being presented on Oct. 20 at Sands Point Preserve gives the bloodsucking count plenty of room to go for the jugular — both in its eerie effects and its effect on the audience. But instead of grand guignol, gore and cobwebs, PUSH Physical Theatre's "Dracula" adapts the oft-told story by retelling it mainly through dance movements — albeit choreography inspired by Stoker's 1897 novel. In a traveling production developed collaboratively at PUSH's Rochester headquarters, the seven-member cast of dancers, acrobats and mimes uses minimal props, dialogue and costumes in what is billed as a "tale of seduction, desire and madness." The story is told through a series of "movement sketches," says artistic director Darren Stevenson. In one, Dracula flies with the help of dancers, who carry the count around the stage in slow motion during a choreographed fight scene between heroes and villains. I get to do plenty of throwing characters around the stage, climbing on them and having them jump and climb on me," says Stevenson, who also plays Dracula and appears in some scenes bare-chested in a long flowing black cape.

If you're looking for Halloween chills minus the splatter seen in some Dracula productions, this version emphasizes the power of suggestion over gore. "Your imagination is always going to be more frightening than anything you can create onstage," Stevenson says. The venue itself is expected to enhance the Gothic mood. Castle Gould, a granite and limestone mansion built — but never lived in — a few years after Stoker published his novel, stands in for Dracula's Transylvania digs. "It's literally a massive, menacing structure that at night is a scary place before you do anything to it," says Beth Horn, managing director of the Sands Point Preserve Conservancy. As audience members gather for the play's opening scene outside the castle, the limestone façade will be bathed in eerie lighting, Horn says. A castle doorway will lead to the castle's Black Box Theater, a cavernous 7,000-square-foot soundstage. Horn says lighting will transform the space into "something dark and quite frightening."

Stevenson, a Dracula devotee since his youth in his native Cornwall, England, says that within the Black Box Theater's murkily lit space, Stoker purists will find answers to questions left open in the novel. "In Bram Stoker's 'Dracula,' the two notable characters whose story we don't get to hear firsthand are Renfield and Dracula himself," Stevenson says. "We wanted to give a window into their world." This story is told through the eyes of Renfield, Dracula's henchman, who is committed to an asylum after a bite on the neck elicits strange behavior. Renfield is portrayed by Walker Robeson. In one of the production's weirdest moments, dancers' bodies meld together to become the table and chair in Renfield's cell. "As he [Renfield] becomes crazier, his furniture starts to communicate with him and moves," Stevenson says. Audiences won't be let off the hook when it comes to psychological terror in this production. Says Stevenson: "Hearing a neck snap alongside a movement is in many ways far more frightening than anything you might do with blood and gore."

WHAT PUSH Physical Theatre's 'Dracula'

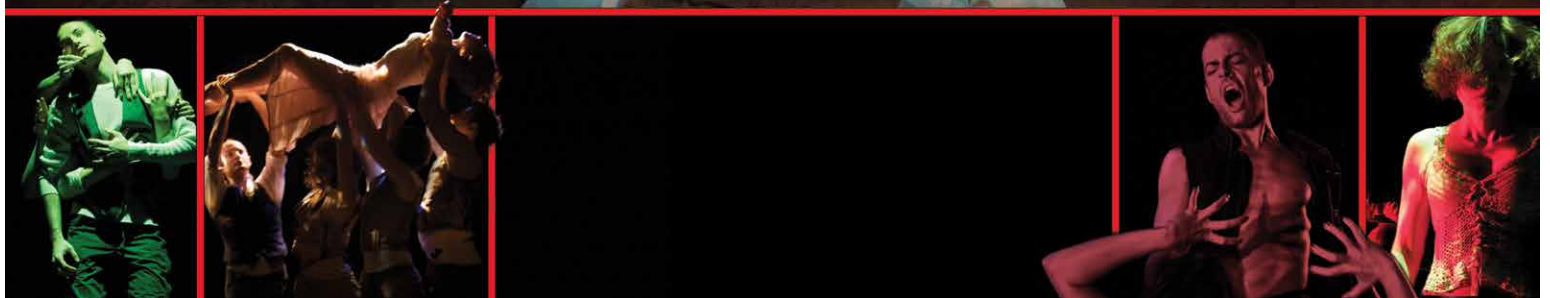
WHEN | WHERE 8 p.m. Oct. 20, Castle Gould's Black Box Theater, Sands Point Preserve, 127 Middle Neck Rd., Sands Point

INFO 516-304-5076, sandspointpreserveconservancy.org

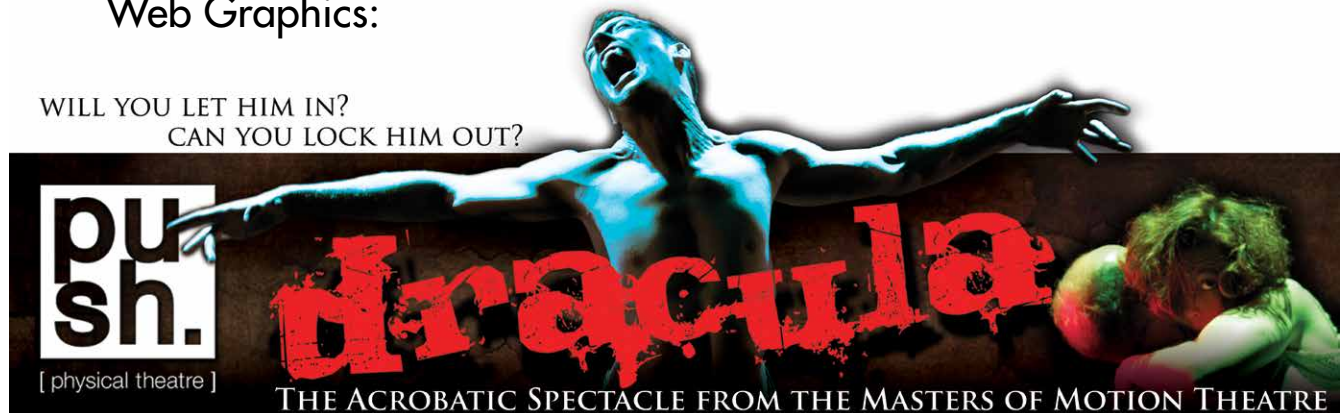
Promotional Media

All marketing assets available for download at: goo.gl/JFXPHR

Posters:



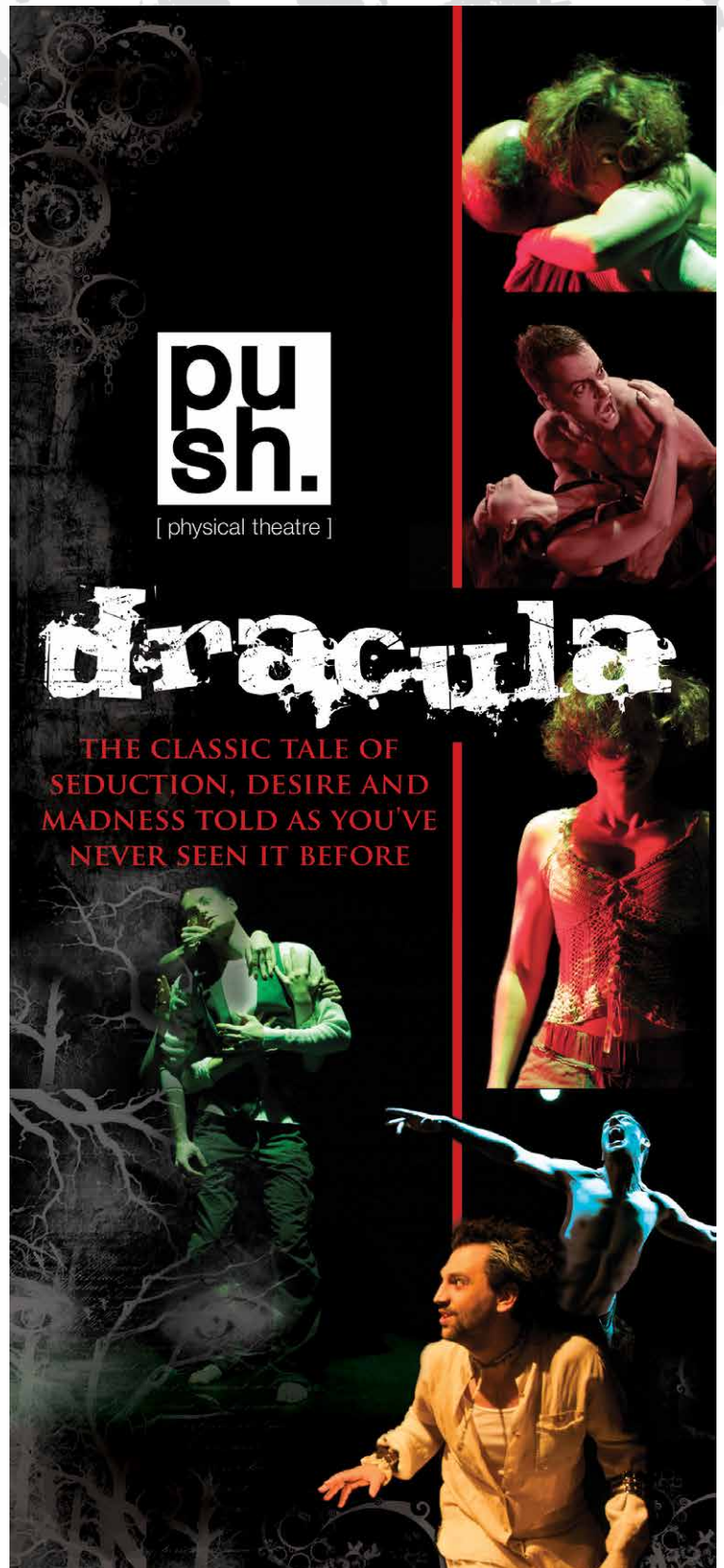
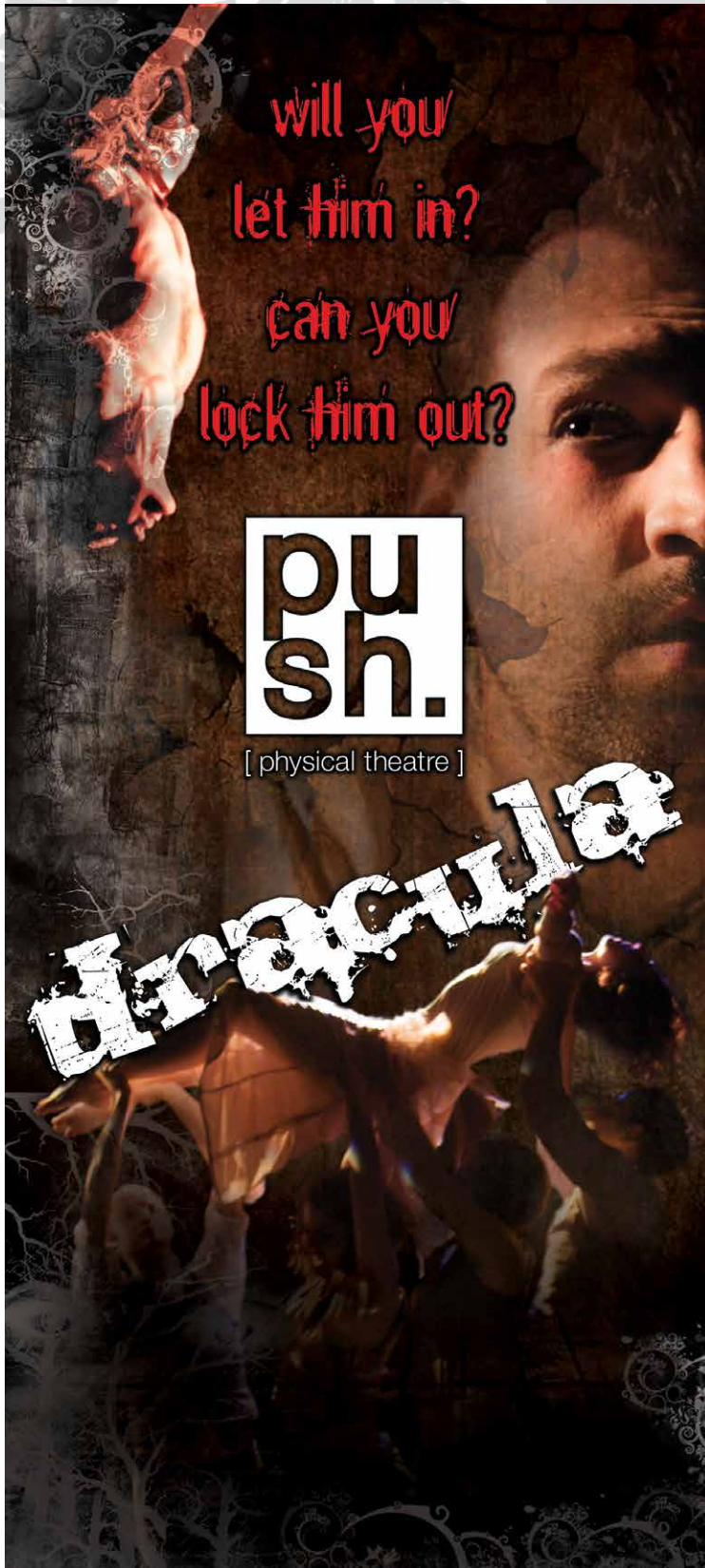
Web Graphics:



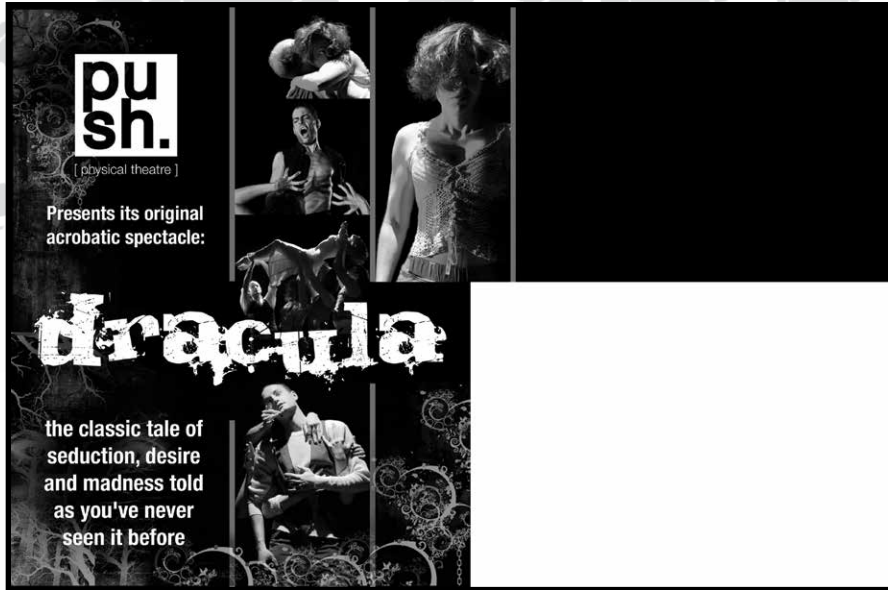
Distribution Cards:

front

back



Post Cards:



Computer Desktops:



Video: See the video now: https://youtu.be/5_bx98MOcTw or your phone to scan the QR code.

