

PHOTOS BY  
CATHARINE  
KENDALL

Luke Hamilton plays  
John, Megan Smith  
plays Barbara, and  
Darlene Dadras plays  
the Dark Witch in the  
University Theatre's  
'Dark of the Moon.'



# Mountain & Mysticism

The University Theatre's production of 'Dark of the Moon' evokes an Appalachian myth

By Jack Clifford  
Oregon Daily Emerald

There is no other place quite like the Appalachian Mountains.

Snuggled up to the Eastern seaboard and ranging from Quebec to Alabama, that chain of terrain is literally and figuratively shrouded in magic and myth. Something funky happens in those smoky hills, and the University Theatre production "Dark of the Moon" aims to let us in on the secret.

Written in the early 1940s, this supernatural love story is based on the ballad "Barbara Allen," which has its origins in the United Kingdom. The tale made it to the States sometime in the 17th century and of the 140-odd versions, one in particular describes a witchboy falling in love with Barbara Allen. The play's authors, Howard Richardson and William Berney, used that theme for their fable.

Set in North Carolina, this performance of "Dark of the Moon" is true to the region's culture, says director Joseph Gilg, right down to the backwoods music and Southern dialect. But if you're thinking the storyline sounds like Hank Williams, Jr. meets Loretta Lynn, leave your clichés at home.

"These are people that would be stereotyped as 'hillbillies,' and it's very easy to think of them as rural hicks," Gilg muses in reference to the 24 characters who make up the cast.

"Really, though, they're trying to solve a very serious problem, and from our own perspectives and our own standards they may seem very unsophisticated about that. But we tried to approach them as real, three-dimensional people, living, breathing, with hopes, desires and dreams and good thoughts."

The "very serious problem" is this relationship between Barbara Allen and the witchboy named John, who is granted his wish to become human so he can woo Barbara. They eventually marry, then Barbara gives birth to a witchchild, whom her midwives burn. The deeply religious community finally helps Barbara break the spell over John, but with devastating consequences.

"Dark of the Moon" premiered on Broadway in 1945 and was first produced one year later at the University under the direction of retired University theater professor Horace Robinson.

This entire UT season has been a tribute to Robinson, with his former students directing plays he previously oversaw. Gilg was a student during his mentor's last two years as a full-time faculty member in 1973-75.

Gilg chose "Dark of the Moon" at least in part because of the play's elaborate stage environment and the mood it creates.

"I think the set is quite abstract, which is what I was going for," he observes. "I like to refer to it as a good machine for acting, because it's fun to move actors around. I'm able to put them in good positions relating to one another, and that always helps advance the dialogue with the audience."

Another way to capture the crowd's attention is through the play's music. The selections not only provide atmosphere and local color, Gilg points out, but also commentary on the action, the characters and the relationships in the play.

"This is a culture where everybody is in some way a musician, where everybody plays an instrument," adds Linda Danielson, who along with University folklore professor Dianne Dugaw, designed the play's music. "We actually jettisoned the original music because it was a cross between Burl Ives and Rodgers and Ham-

merstein. The sound now grows out of the action and is very organic to the culture."

The selections are what Danielson calls "traditional Southern mountain music," with fiddles, banjos, guitars, and even an Appalachian dulcimer providing the melodies.

Of course, the third leg to any solid production is a capable cast, and Gilg is impressed with his collection of talent.

"Luke Hamilton, who plays John, and Megan Smith as Barbara are very seasoned veterans actors, and they usually make a director look very good," he comments. "Rowan Morrison, as Preacher Haggler, is doing a terrific job with a fire-and-brimstone approach."

If you have never experienced the mysterious qualities of the Appalachians, get ready for a surreality check, Gilg says.

"People coming to the play from Eugene will in fact enter another world," he surmises. "But I think in terms of the story being told, they will be able to connect with those people and those problems and that effort to solve those problems."

## Coming Up

**What:** 'Dark of the Moon'

**When:** May 21-22 and 27-29 and June 4-5 at 8 p.m.; May 23 at 2 p.m.

**Where:** Robinson Theatre in Villard Hall

**Tickets:** \$4.50 for students; \$8 for faculty, staff, senior citizens and non-UO students; \$10 for the general public. Matinee tickets are \$5 for students, \$10 for the general public. Call 346-4191.

## Dark of the Moon

by Howard Richardson & William Berney

Directed by Joseph Gilg



A Robinson Theatre Production

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