

# Portland theatre sinks their teeth into *Dracula*



PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTHWEST CHILDREN'S THEATRE

*Dracula*, Andres Alcalá, seduces his beautiful neighbor, Mina, Val Lundrum. The most famous vampire of all time takes the stage at the Northwest Children's Theatre just in time for Halloween.

SHELBI WESCOTT

Feature Editor

Vampires, these creatures of the night that prey upon victims by sucking their blood, have intrigued Monster lovers for generations. Every culture throughout time has had its own myths about the legendary "undead." However, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* created the vampire we know today. It is a story of Good versus Evil, of Freudian longings and of sin and salvation.

Movies and theatre, portraying Count Dracula and his story, have tried to capture the essence and genius of Stoker's novel. Few have succeeded. Now, The Northwest Children's Theatre and School joins the many that have adapted *Dracula* for the stage.

The seemingly rushed story and under-developed characters will disappoint true fans of Stoker's novel. One would almost have to know the story beforehand in order to follow the plot lines. This is a great example of what happens when novels, fraught with symbolism, description and characterization, are turned into a 2-hour play or movie. There is no way to capture the true essence of the *Dracula* story in that short frame of time.

The night I saw the show, The Children's Theatre was having technical difficulties with their pyrotechnics and a few other special effects. Granted it was the preview night performance, so a few mistakes are allotted. I can imagine (with my vivid imagination) that the special effects would have been a great addition to the show's ambience.

Ambience is one thing this show was not lacking. Director John

## *Dracula*

Northwest Children's Theatre  
1819 Everett (Portland)  
\$14 for adults  
\$9 for children under 12  
call 222-4480 for more  
information

Monteverde used only gray, black and white (with an occasional splash of red) in his set and costume designs. The lighting was dark and most of the scenes were candle lit, which adds an eerie feeling throughout the show. Not to mention, in every scene the Nosferatu (the undead), dressed in long black and gray robes and with their faces painted white, move about the stage as scenery and as Dracula's henchmen. They are already on stage at the top of the show, blending into the scenery, and when they come alive it is a wonderful effect.

The performances by the actors were less than exemplary. (Again, I'll allow leeway for this being a preview night.) Val Lundrum, who plays Mina, carries the show with her natural stage presence and dramatic flair. Also, Erik James, a longtime theatre veteran in Portland, adds an element of comic relief as the goofy asylum attendant. Andres Alcalá is haunting as Dracula, and does the best he can to salvage a weak script.

The Northwest Children's Theatre production of *Dracula* is nothing special and leaves something to be desired for its audience. Scenes are anticlimactic, most of the acting is dry and long bouts of exposition do nothing to further the story.

Oh well, they tried. Take my advice: read the book.

# Ideas of morality, art on trial in *Gross Indecency*

ANGIE DASCHEL

A&amp;E Editor

"Gross indecency": the Victorian expression for acts of homosexuality, which in the late 19th century was punishable by two years of hard labor in prison. Oscar Wilde, the successful author of such plays as *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband*, was charged with this crime in 1895, and was imprisoned for two years. Now, more than 100 years later, Artists Repertory Theatre is presenting *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, which tells the incredible downfall of the flamboyant playwright.

Written by Moisés Kaufman, *Gross Indecency* incorporates trial transcripts, newspaper articles, personal correspondence, interviews and books to tell the story of Wilde, played by Michael Lasswell, and his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas. Seven other male cast members make up a sort of Greek chorus, in which all seven portray many different characters during the play.

The first trial begins with Wilde charging Douglas' father with libel for claiming Wilde was a "posing sodomite." Much to his surprise, Wilde loses the lawsuit and the information learned during the trial leads to his arrest for "gross

indecency." The second trial proceeds to trash his reputation, his bank account and his spirit, but subsequently ends in a hung jury. Wilde is convicted in the third trial and sent to prison, from which he will emerge broken and destitute.

A play such as *Gross Indecency* requires strict attention to the action on stage; not only to catch all the character changes,

## *Gross Indecency*

Artists Repertory Theatre  
1516 SW Alder St. (Portland)  
Now-Oct. 17  
For tickets and information,  
call 241-1ART

but also to understand the powerful, witty and intelligent dialogue. Wilde's ideas about art and morality take center stage in this play, even though he was being tried for homosexual acts. His century-old ideas in this play still generate controversy.

*Gross Indecency* is so engaging because the plot jumps around frequently, taking the audience with it. The actors quote from many publications at a rapid-fire pace, yet the play remains understandable and very entertaining because of Kaufman's excellent synthesis of history and drama.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE

Above: Michael Lasswell plays the title role in *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, appearing this month at Artists Repertory Theatre. Lasswell is also the director and the scenic and costume designer for the drama.