

Counting on Dracula

A mish-mash of genres makes for a confusing production

Staring at a beautiful set constructed from a raised, thrust stage, you wonder how Ted Tiller's *Count Dracula* will proceed at the Cottage Theatre. Will Reva Kaufman, five-time director of the show, take us down the traditional route that Tiller meticulously calls for in the script, or will we be guided somewhere a little more interesting?

The show begins with Sybil (Nancy West) and Hennessey (David Work). At first, the stilted line delivery between the two seems to indicate a lack of motivation and fluidity, but we can't be sure this isn't the intended effect. How we take this style depends on where the show will lead us. Are we watching melodrama, camp or farce?

Ultimately, this lack of definition permeates the entire first act and is the weakness in Kaufman's production. Though the actors ease into the show and deliver a much stronger second and third act, the first act leaves the audience confused. Can we laugh at this or not?

Tiller's script is a lengthy three acts with detailed scenic directions. It also lends itself to ambiguity. With this type of script, the director needs to provide focus rather than let it wander. Kaufman fails to push the script in any well-defined direction.

The role that lends itself to rigidity is the straightforward character of Dr. Seward (Paul von Rotz). However, when we see the same type of stillness in West and Work, it comes across as stilted and inorganic. Again, we can't be sure if this is a true lack of motivation or excellent acting in the context of a camp show.

As the production proceeds and we are introduced to more characters, it begins to define itself a bit better. With the introduction of Mina (Charlotte Gallagher), we receive our damsel in distress. Gallagher finds a mix between the straightness of the other characters and a more genuine subtext. We also meet Jonathan Harker (Joseph Snyder-Kloos) and Count Dracula himself (Chris McVay). Harker, the save-the-day hero, is played appropriately by Snyder-Kloos, who, despite suffering from some of the same mechanical delivery as the other actors, brings out the protagonist nature we need from Harker. Dracula appears and brings a powerful presence with McVay's hardy voice and energy.

The show is rounded out by two other performances that help string things along. Renfield (Tom Wilson) is instantly likeable and gives us a crazy man with whom we can empathize. Finally, the strongest performance comes from Van Helsing (Bill



Count Dracula (Chris McVay) hypnotizes Sybil Steward (Nancy West)

Campbell). Campbell is, by far, the most motivated actor and one of the few who brings real urgency to the stage.

With the first act over, the second and third provide the campy side of the show, and we're able to appreciate it. We get character quirks, best exemplified by Gallagher's smirk, which lets us know it's OK to laugh. We also are able to enjoy some of the design work. In addition to the beautiful costuming, the tiny Cottage Theatre does an impressive job of creating trap doors and trick paintings. However, the design is not without fault. Though the use of a plastic, soaring bat couldn't have been taken seriously, we again can't be sure of the intention. The audience

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laughter at the prop should be indication of its effect. Likewise, the sound design was comical — terribly comical. Though Tiller's script dictates the placement of sound cues, the sound design could have reached out and been much less silly.

The show may be worthy of a trip down to the Cottage Theatre, but don't go hoping to see more than a fun Halloween show. With nothing too scary for the kids, it could be a fun trip for families, but ultimately it may wander a bit too much for the serious theatergoer.

EW

Count Dracula runs Oct. 19-21 and Oct. 26-27 and 31, Cottage Theater. \$11-\$13. Call 942-8001 for tix.

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