

TIME WARPED

ACE's Rocky Horror falls short of the debauchery that made it a cult classic

Before attending *The Rocky Horror Show* last weekend put on by the Actors Cabaret of Eugene (ACE), I'd only seen the show as performed at an old, gutted movie theater where curtain call began around 2 am, or whenever each cast member had polished off his or her fifth of hard alcohol.

At that old theater, in addition to traditional audience props (which already included open flames), there were bongos passed from row to row. I was one of probably five people wearing something that covered my butt.

This musical comedy is produced at thousands of theatres every October. Some joints even dedicate off-season time: Portland's Clinton Street Theater has screened the film every Saturday since 1978. Why?

Certainly not the "plotline": a prude couple gets a flat tire in a rainstorm, asks to use a phone at what turns out to be a goth "transvestite's" sex lair, and becomes corrupted and sexed-up with a flourish not unlike the last scene of *Grease*.

The reason *Rocky Horror* has become a cult classic lies not in plot, or perhaps even production, but the tradition of gleeful, titillating and raucous audience participation. Tear down the fourth wall! It is *Rocky Horror* custom for audiences to dress up as characters and shout lines at the performers.

Far from cultural or intellectual satisfaction, the musical offers a pure distillation of revelry, and this is where ACE fell short.



THE CAST OF ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW

PHOTO: ACTORS CABARET OF EUGENE

This is only in small part the fault of the cast. Michael P. Watkins, as dominatrix-meets-mad scientist Dr. Frank N. Furter (Watkins also directed), was over the top — weird British accent and all. Even he was very nearly upstaged, though, by his crazy-eyed alien servant Riff Raff (Gerald Walters), whose tongue was put to good use several hilarious times.

Brad (Cody Mendonca) and Janet (Kate Wolfenbarger) were convincingly doe-eyed with vocal talent to boot, and with the exception of a few lukewarm performances, the ensemble cast was invested in the madness.

No, the real trouble was the audience, the venue, the

event itself. When one rogue attendee cried out "ASSHOLE!" at the mention of Brad's name (which is customary audience call-back dialogue), she was merely laughed at uncomfortably, and the show went on.

"Give yourself over to absolute pleasure!" boasts the ACE's poster for the show. Yet, the impression was one of routine: a nice night out, supporting good community dinner theatre.

So audiences, it's on you, too, to make this the delicious night of depravity it should be. ■

The Rocky Horror Show plays through Oct. 31 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene; \$16-\$42.95. Tickets at 683-4368 or actorscabaret.org.

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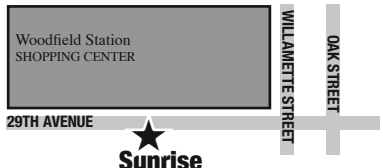


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