

Dracula

Dracula was presented by The Stage Club on 24th May 2012 at the DBS Arts Centre – Home of the SRT.

To modern viewers, the thought of horror and vampires would require excessive blood and gore with special effects in high definition. This makes The Stage Club's endeavour of presenting Dracula an ambitious one by all accounts. Yet, it did overcome the odds and presented the audience with a credible and relatively spine chilling play. The production was helmed by the sterling performances of Alexander Gow (Dracula), Douglas Scott (Van Helsing), Paul Robson (Jonathan Harker), Hemang Yadav (Jack Seward) and Nicholas Kenny (Renfield).

Gow as the Count himself exuded an enigmatic presence as in his search for eternal youth as he haunted the streets of Europe for his victims. His ability to tweak his demeanour from a frail Count to the youthful prince of darkness after drawing blood and the youth of his countless victims certainly proved that he has the acting chops for the role. The best testament of the craft of this consummate actor was that despite having lesser stage time than Van Helsing and gang, I found myself taking frequent glances towards the background just to see if he was looming; the uncomfortable presence of Dracula remained even though he was not there.

Scott, Robson and Yadav did not pale in comparison. It was unbelievable that this was Scott's first role in a play as his portrayal of Dr Van Helsing was impeccable. His measured performance and chemistry with Robson, Yadav and Jesse Hastings (Arthur Holmwood) could have fooled anyone into believing that he has some experience under his belt. Robson started the show well as Jonathan Harker who got increasingly tortured by what he had seen in Transylvania. He continued to anchor the show with a strong performance as he joined Van Helsing to stop Dracula and, hopefully, save his wife from turning into the undead. His chemistry with Rachel Lashford (Mina Murray) enhanced his portrayal of the worried husband who planned on seeking revenge yet was torn by his wife's request to vanquish Dracula out of pity.

Yadav as Dr Seward provided a contrast to the rest of the Van Helsing gang. He exuded a sense of stoicism which helped to keep the action under control and the moments in which he expressed fear and worry were certainly valuable to the audience.

Special commendation must go to Nicholas Kenny for his portrayal of Reinfield, the tortured mental patient who served Dracula and struggled with not wanting to kill anyone. Kenny's masterful performance was certainly a treat to the audience. His consistency of his portrayal was nuanced and he managed to handle the complexity of the

emotions well. He has a keen sense of rhythm and timing and the subtle demands – such as his entrances and peeping from the background – were handled with much aplomb. I found myself being intrigued by Kenny each time he entered the scene.

While Ruth Mannion (Lucy Westenra) and Rachel Lashford (Mina Murray) did have some great moments, their performances were marred by their inability to portray a progression of emotions. This could be seen when they were vacillating between being human and undead as they were prone to sudden outbursts with no visible sign of the transformation. However, credit must go to them for having good chemistry with the actors playing their husband and lover.

Jesse Hastings as Arthur Holmwood started off his performance with an uncomfortable presence as his portrayal of emotions seemed to be based on preconceived notions of how it should be. However, as the play progressed, he eased into his role and was able to match the rest of the principle cast.

For a production by a community theatre company, I am impressed by this production in view of the limitations it faces in terms of cost and resources. However, the play could be improved in terms of its pace as it felt a little draggy. Additionally, its logistics could be better managed as the lighting and sound cues, while well designed, were not on time on several occasions. Some of the closing scenes were also marred by the fact that the crew dragging the props could be heard offstage. The ensemble characters, especially the vampire brides, could be more energetic and should take caution not to drop their characterisation as they were exiting the scene.

All things considered, Dracula proves that the suspense and horror lie in the story and the actors rather than special effects. This production is a befitting tribute to Bram Stoker as this year marks the 100th anniversary of his death. While Dracula was vanquished in the end, his presence would continue to haunt the imaginations of many for generations to come.

Dracula is on now till 26th of May at the DBS Arts Centre – Home of the SRT. Please visit [Sistic](#) or go to any of its counters to get your tickets.