

Account of Purley on Thames

Rain or Shine - Dracula

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Dracula, or a Pain in the Neck

“Fangs ain't what they used to be” could have been an alternative title for Rain or Shine's production when they visited The Barn on Friday evening, December 8th. Tom Jordan's inventive direction involved modern and original elements such as Dracula making his first entrance on a skateboard, some well-rehearsed ad-libs, e.g. “And don't call me Shirley,” and malapropisms such as “you, living in your irony tower.”

The traditional elements of Bram Stoker's Gothic horror story, written in 1897, were there too, as Professor Van Helsing tried to prevent the infamous Count from sinking his teeth into everyone. The audience were treated to comedy, slapstick and energetic chaos, as well as Dracula being confronted by sunlight and the crucifix. Of the four-strong cast, playing a variety of roles, company veteran Anthony Young excelled as Dracula, hamming it up for all he was worth, with a widow's peak, long flowing cloak and terrible teeth, which he forgot to remove on one occasion as he switched to the character of Doctor Seward.

Those who were looking forward to the more bizarre elements of the tale were not disappointed either. The lunatic Renfield appears behind the bars of the asylum as well as in a vertical coffin on stage, and clever special effects enable Dracula to feed Mina Murray with his own blood so that he can control her. A hovering bat makes a brief but comical appearance, and Dracula eventually dies in smokey London after relocating from darkest Transylvania, a stake having been driven through his heart - a metaphor for an early version of Brexit perhaps!

So the adapted version of Stoker's tale excited as well as amused the 120 strong audience, whose support and generosity at the leaving collection means that £400 can be donated to Reading Street Pastors (reading@streetpastors.org.uk) the charity to benefit on this occasion.

My sincere thanks to all those involved with the event, especially those who helped prepare The Barn and refreshments, and the families who hosted the actors for their overnight stay in Purley.

Rain or Shine will return on Friday, June 8th to present Shakespeare's “Much Ado About Nothing.” Until their next visit, it is a case, as Dracula might have said, of “Fangs for the memory.”

David Downs