

Arts & Entertainment

Dracula faithful to its macabre genre

review by P. J. Groenveldt

For some reason, Dr. Seward's daughter Lucy is a tad anaemic. She's weak and pale, and has strange dreams. She also has two little red marks on her neck. He wonders what could be wrong. Maybe he should ask the new neighbor, Count Dracula, over to read to her.

When the fictional doctor, played by William Fisher, made this decision, one could practically hear the entire audience thinking, "Hoo, boy, is that guy stupid!". But when first presented in dramatic form in the late 1920's, before "Dracula" became a household word, this scene would have aroused no such reaction from most people. Only those hip to Eastern European folktales or those who had read the Bram Stoker novel (pub. 1897) would know the true cause of Lucy's (and her friend Mena's before her) strange illness. Suspicion would fall on bats, wolves, "consumption", or on the strangely rational madman Renfield (Richard McMillan), who believes that by consuming other living creatures he can live longer himself.

This movie/novel/comic strip world has reached the vampire saturation point. Today's audience is, sadly, more sophisticated, and this horror/mystery loses something vital and becomes mere melodrama. Even the horror is toned down by today's standards. When you can walk into any movie theatre and see a man's head lopped off by ninjas or women dissolved in acid, a little bit of biting and sucking isn't going to alarm you any.

The most gruesome thing in this production is Dr. Seward's innocent explanation for the wounds on the victim's neck — she must have thrust a safety pin through her skin in her delirium. Eeeeyyaagghh! I would definitely prefer to be bitten by George de la Pena. His portrayal of the wicked Count is properly erotic, grasping the hapless Lucy's buttock as he bites her, his shirt open to the waist for no good reason other than to let her bite him in return. (Why does she bite him on the pec rather than the neck? Is it a matter of height, or gratification for audience members?) I was disappointed that Count Dracula wasn't as evil and mysterious in



George de la Pena (Dracula) and Catherine Barroll (Lucy) engage in some blood lust in the Citadel production of Dracula.

the first act as he could have been, since we all knew he was a vampire anyway.

The set, created by designer Terry Gunvordahl, is a marvelous thing. It changes from vaulted library-like room to Lucy's bedroom to a cavernous and gloomy burial vault, all with maximum efficiency and minimum disbelief. Dracula's casket is festooned with Forey-esque winged skulls. (The award-winning set for a recent New York production was designed by Edward Gorey, King of the Macabre) The effects are equal to the task; things burst into flame, other things appear from nowhere, and a perfectly substantial actor

vanishes in a swirl of cape.

The staging, however is somewhat awkward, as certain scenes are forced to occur in the lady's boudoir which would not have been tolerated in polite society at that time period (or this, for that matter). A madman (Renfield) runs amok and must be restrained, that strange count from next door pops in for a chat, male friends of the family discuss European vampire repellents, and servants flirt. Not at all proper upstairs behavior.

Catherine Barroll's performance of the innocent walking bloodbank Lucy is well done and even excellent in the scene where she reveals to her boring and normal fiance Jonathan Harker (David Ley) the changes in attitude her nocturnal exploits have brought about.

Van Helsing is played by Donal Donnelly, whom you may recognize as the brandy-quaffing dinner guest from *The Dead*. He is very convincing, which is the one thing that character has to accomplish. Van Helsing has to convince the others that: (a) a vampire is responsible for Lucy's illness, (b) that Count Dracula was that vampire, and (c) that he should be killed, regardless of local habits, customs, and laws. My only argument with this portrayal is the last line of the play, spoken just after the fabulous climax in the Count's burial chamber. This line is directed to the audience, breaking the fourth wall for no reason beyond a childish warning about Transylvanian immigrants. It spoils the otherwise excellent executed finish.

By far my favorite character was Renfield the madman (Richard McMillan). He bounced between complex rundowns of his own world and parrotlike repetitions of generalizations undoubtedly spoken to him during his psychiatric "treatment" (such as it was in the 1920's). "Madmen often display great strength", and "I know I must be mad, normal people don't see these things" (Funny, Lucy did.)

One of the fascinating things about early speculative fiction and fantasy was that the unbelievable was often seen through the eyes of the mad (Renfield) or the feverish (Lucy) in order to facilitate the suspension of the reader's disbelief. The average reader would have been new to fiction of any kind, let alone the fantastic, so they could choose to see the entire thing as a character's hallucination if they so desired. This approach was used for most of Brian Rintoul's production, except the last scenes where the supernatural aspects of Dracula were revealed to the skeptic in the cast (Seward).

In all, *Dracula* was a smoothly presented and beautiful production — faithful to the genre it represented. If you can sit down to it with an open mind, uncontaminated by your previous encounters with vampire drama, you will not leave unrewarded.



John Ferreira blows some sax for Colin James.

Bear Country rocks

**Bear Country, U of A Butterdome
Colin James, Blue Penguin and Grace
Under Pressure
Friday, September 23**

review by Benjamin Gali

After consuming a couple of those lukewarm beverages they sold in cups Saturday night, I started to catch the fever of Bear Country, an occasion which is not only an excuse to become alcohol-soaked but a fund-raising event put on by the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity to raise money for the U of A Athletics Department, the Hazeldean Boys Club and the fraternity. Perhaps unaware of the latter, the 3500 or more in attendance firmly believed in the former.

The concert lasted some five or six hours and was highlighted by Colin James, who received little help from Grace Under Pressure and Blue Penguin.

Grace Under Pressure had the task of opening. With the help of a sound system which was no help at all the band was unfortunately ineffective, failing to get across to the audience. Having seen them play before and also having heard them on vinyl, it was apparent that, despite the inappropriateness of the venue, the band has had better nights.

Next came a short break with pre-recorded music booming from the speakers, foreshadowing what was about to

come. Blue Penguin appeared with a sound that could be classified as quality but lacked in originality. Playing covers from heroes such as U2 and Peter Gabriel, they succeeded in picking up the atmosphere and I did bump into more glazed faced people who were overindulging in those luke warm beverages that they sold in plastic cups.

With another break, a bit longer than the first, I had a chance to add to my limited knowledge of Colin James. What it came down to was "a hot guitarist from Vancouver with one self titled album, who is starting to get recognized." James having toured with Stevie Ray Vaughan for the past few years, they have a noticeable similarity in styles. Both play jutting bluesy riffs that tear right through the tension of anticipation of those on the receiving end.

The time had come and Colin James had arrived. Ripping right into his thunderous "Chick 'n' Cars," one got an immediate impression of a guitar hero who had the jam packed stagefront mesmerized by his guitar antics. Sticking to numbers ranging on the blues scale, James had the crowd yelling for more. He returned the crowds' adulation by playing his album in its entirety.

Thus ended Bear Country for another year and overall things were quite a success. Maybe for next year we could chill those luke warm things they sold in plastic cups.

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