

DRACULA

2004

8-13 Nov

## Prepare to be chilled

FOR the first time Teddington Theatre Club are presenting a Liz Lohead play. **Dracula** runs at the Hampton Hill Playhouse, 90 High Street, Hampton Hill from Monday November 8 to Saturday November 13.

This production is being directed by Marc Batten.

The Guardian said the following: "Liz Lohead's 'Dracula' shrugs off all those fanged Hammer spoofs and restores real tragedy to Bram Stoker's tale. In this powerful and poetic version Lohead moves

beyond Stoker too. The outpourings of a madman paradoxically reveal the sort of sanity Lear's fool becomes, in his chains and strait jacket, an image of the chaotic unacceptable truth within us all".

On a dark stormy winter's evening prepare to be chilled and thrilled by this mesmerising adaptation of the classic Gothic vampire novel.

The box office number for this show is 8979 9499 (2pm to 9pm only).

## Brave attempt at a difficult play

Richmond Drama Awards

Joy Manners

THE play presented by Teddington Theatre Club at the Hampton Hill Playhouse last week was **Dracula** as told by the modern Scottish poet and playwright Liz Lohead. First performed in 1989 it calls for very tight direction and committed ensemble acting by a large cast.

The set was constructed in two halves. One half was the interior of Dracula's castle and the other the home in England of Mina and Lucy Westerman. In the centre were the iron gates of the lunatic asylum where Dr Arthur Seward, played by John Kipps, cared for his patients.

The play's story is the quest of Jonathan Harker, played by Paul Grimwood, his friend Dr Seward and Professor Van Helsing to find and kill Count Dracula who has turned Arthur's fiancée Lucy into a vampire and is endeavouring to do the same to Jonathan's wife Mina.

Scott O'Brien was utterly convincing as the lunatic Renfield. He had able support from Tina Graham and the rough Nurse Grice.

Amanda-Jade Tyler had the difficult role of Lucy Westerman. She enters as a petulant self-willed but affectionate young lady and

during the play changes into a vampire seeking to devour those around her.

Lengthy speeches in which the author endeavoured to inform the audience of off-stage events made for a tedious first half. The frequent wheeling about of furniture while the play was in progress did not aid concentration. Lucy Westman's frequent fussing with her own and her maid's hair, done to show her anxious state of mind, became very irritating.

Help arrived after the interval in the imposing shape of Andrew Cockerill as Professor Van Helsing. He brought assurance to the proceedings as the practical scientist who planned and led the expedition to Dracula's castle.

David Wheatly tried hard to chill as Count Dracula but was hampered by the set, unhelpful lighting and a bulky costume.

Costumes were generally in period. Neat hairstyles for the women would surely have been more in keeping for the Victorian era in which the play is set than the elaborate curly wigs used in the production.

Programme notes did not mention the playwright Liz Lohead. Information concerning the differences between her version and the Bram Stoker story would have been helpful.

Thanks to director Marc Batten and his team for a brave attempt to stage a difficult play.

For more than 100 years, the legend of Count Dracula has terrified audiences via film, books, plays and even ballet.

Now Teddington Theatre Club is to stage their version of the gothic horror classic that is guaranteed to send a shiver up your spine.

On a cold, dark night, a ship from Transylvania drops anchor off the Yorkshire coast and its cargo, a coffin containing Count Dracula, is taken ashore.

The Count begins a bloody reign of terror and only one man, Van Helsing, can stop him.

The show's director Marc Batten said: "It is a play I have wanted to do since I was at university.

"We are doing Liz Lohead's version, which I was attracted to because of her beautiful imagery and use of language.

"The show is quite sexually charged and we have not shied away from that.

"There is partial nudity,

# Marc makes it Count

**Count Dracula**  
— Hampton Hill  
Playhouse

by Gareth Foreman

which will attract some people and probably put others off!"

Getting unpaid actresses to take their clothes off might have been problematical, but Marc was honest with his cast from the start.

"I told them there would be nudity - it was in the text, in the stage directions and is an integral part of the story, so there was no way I was going

to cut it out," he said.

"But it is done very tastefully and in character."

Staging a horror story might conjure up images of serious sombre rehearsals, but Marc - who teaches drama in Ealing when he is not directing - insists they have been a laugh.

"When you are putting on a serious melodrama the acting can verge on hammy and, therefore, can be quite funny," he said.

"On more than one occasion we have had to stop rehearsals because we have been laughing so much."

**Dracula, Hampton Hill Playhouse, 90 High Street, Hampton Hill, November 8-13, £8. Call 020 8979 9499 from 2pm to 9pm only.**

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