



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## DRACULA

### Shake and Stir Theatre Co.

Space Theatre

Until 16 Sep 2017

Review by Anthony Vawser

If the theatre community is determined to keep "Dracula" as fresh and vibrant as he possibly can be (especially after all these years of being such a highly visible standard-bearer for the undead), then director Michael Fitcher and the team at Shake & Stir have taken a solidly successful step towards maintaining the durability and effectiveness of the classic Bram Stoker story.

Nick Skubij's Count Dracula (aided by costumes from Leigh Buchanan and make-up by Alex Ouston) has been given a non-traditional appearance, which is the correct instinct; even if he brings to mind the visual equivalent to both Rocky Horror's Riff-Raff and a Scandinavian goth-metal guitarist, Skubij has the performing skills to make this creature as seriously sinister as he should be. The early scenes are, however, a mixed-bag, due to Jonathan Harker being played by Michael Wahr at a level of broad theatricality that is distracting and feels inappropriate, though his recorded narration is pitch perfect.

Nelle Lee's Mina combines breathtaking beauty with dramatic presence; her seduction by the Count is genuinely repulsive to witness, which is a credit to both actors involved. Adele Querol commendably captures the warmth and charm of Lucy, along with the tragedy and savagery of her grim fate.

Ross Balbuziente cuts an engagingly impish figure in the role of Jack Seward, though his English accent is mostly MIA. David Whitney executes a rather remarkable double-duty as both Renfield and Van Helsing; his performance in the latter role operates successfully as an anchoring influence to the play as a whole, especially during the scenes containing elaborately choreographed violence that threaten to spin out of control.

Co-adapters Lee and Skubij have done a fine job streamlining the text and focusing in on the task of telling their tale with both tension and movement. They clearly recognise that Stoker's story supports multiple thematic interpretations, from 'the beast within' to 'fear of infectious illness and death', also shrewdly homing on age-old fears that are either particular to each gender or shared by both. "Dracula" certainly has the potential to generate a lively post-show 'date-night' discussion!

Set Designer Josh McIntosh brilliantly caters to all the locations and spaces required for this story by way of a versatile revolve. Jason Glenwright's lighting and Guy Webster's sound/music couldn't be better at evoking the right mood for this play. The incorporation of mist and fire effects is especially dazzling, and the blood is convincing enough without ever going over the top.

There are tremendous challenges involved in depicting supernatural, monstrous evil that is intended to frighten or disturb a live theatre audience, not to mention in sustaining a tale that one might think had been told – not to mention parodied – within an inch of its life. Though not every step taken here by Shake & Stir is a steady one, the excellent qualities overpower the minor flaws of this production, resulting in a show that is efficiently told and effectively presented, and one that lands on solid ground far more often than not.