

Stage design enhances 'Frankenstein'

CURTAIN CALL!

Theater Review

AMY SHANNON Features Editor

FRANKENSTEIN
OOO (out of five)

Four gargoyle heads silently stared into the audience.

Almost every seat in Drayton Hall was filled as the crowd waited for Theatre USC's *Frankenstein* to begin.

The opening scene flooded the audience with complete darkness before revealing a single shaft of light. Everyone's attention was drawn to the stage.

The play began, the actors and actresses were introduced and the storyline unfolded as planned.

But the part of the performance that stood out the most was the incredible set design and scenery. Creatively painted and constructed, each set was a presentation in itself.

From the graveyard to the parlor room, the scenes were realistic and visually engaging. The costumes complemented the scenery and fit in with the time period of the 19th century.

"*Frankenstein* achieves a technical level not often seen in our productions," faculty lighting designer Jim Hunter said. "From the machinery in Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory to pyrotechnics to the atmosphere that envelops you as soon as you enter the theater."

By far the most imaginative and interesting set was Frankenstein's laboratory. Heavy chains and hooks hung from the ceiling. Scientific instruments and gadgets were scattered around the room.

In the middle of the laboratory, the operating table was surrounded by dozens of flasks and beakers, each filled with colorful bubbling liquids. Purple, orange, amber and yellow concoctions endlessly boiled inside their containers.

It couldn't have been closer to the image that springs to mind when you think of a mad scientist's laboratory.

But the actual plot of the story might not be what you were expecting.

"This is a very different *Frankenstein*," director Jim O'Connor said. "There will be no electric bolts sticking out of his neck. In fact, he's a very human creature who can't understand why people are so frightened of him and find him so ugly."

"Everyone forgets that Frankenstein is the name of the doctor, while the creature is never given a name," he said.

It's not patterned after the classic black and white *Frankenstein* movie. Although some similarities can be found between the old Hollywood film versions and Theatre USC's interpretation, the play more closely follows the novel written by Mary Shelley in 1818.

Both the novel and the play question what it means to be alive, to create life and to be a human being. Both works ask humans what right we have in claiming ourselves as "Creators," a question that remains contemporary in this age of genetic engineering and cloning.

But in the theater version, there are several adaptations from the original text which keep the story moving from one scene to the next and help tie the plot together.

One aspect of Shelley's *Frankenstein* that stays the same in the USC production is the cast of characters.

Victor Frankenstein, played by graduate student William Kwapy, is portrayed as the selfish and self-centered person he was intended to be. Kwapy shows the audience Frankenstein's cowardliness in confronting his Creature and attempting to deny all responsibility.

Truly in love with Frankenstein, despite his many faults, is his fiancée. Played by junior Lindsay Wray, the fiancée seems genuinely concerned for Frankenstein throughout the performance and supports Kwapy well.

As Frankenstein's best friend, graduate student Walter Brandes takes on the role of Henry Clerval. Brandes personifies the essential friend who is alternately the voice of reason, the easily persuaded, the eager side kick and the element of humor (remember the wall in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

Frankenstein and Clerval team up to create the Creature, played by senior Mike Colter. Colter fits the role perfectly with his deep voice, height and toned physique. His "learning to walk" scene is justifiably tedious. No one learns to walk and talk in just three minutes.

As the Creature's only true friend, senior Matt Engle quite convincingly portrays a blind cripple. It's hard to tell if he really is lame or not, and his untimely death is a definite tragedy.

Rounding out the 12-member cast are two grave diggers played by senior Joshua Gardener and junior Dwayne Spence, the dutiful nanny/servant played by junior Amy Dietz, and Frau Muller played by graduate student Ellen Rosenberg.

Professors Hunter Boyle and Richard Jennings also appear in the performance, as well as seventh grader Brendan Smith.

Overall, the play flows along at a nice pace. Scene transitions are smooth and quick.

Although the performance wasn't superb, it was certainly an applaudable effort. It's definitely worth seeing, especially if you're familiar with Shelley's novel.

Audience reaction was mixed. Some gave the drama a standing ovation while others left the theater with unsatisfied looks on their faces.

Frankenstein runs through Sept. 28 in Drayton Hall. Curtain times are 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 3 p.m. Sundays.



SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

The Frankenstein household toasts happier moments before the birth of the Creature. Pictured (left to right) are: Hunter Boyle as Lionel, William Kwapy as Victor, Lindsay Wray as Elizabeth and Amy Dietz as Justine.

Tickets are available at the Longstreet box office from noon to 5:30 p.m. weekdays and one hour before the show.

Ticket prices are \$10 for the general public, \$8 for senior citizens, faculty and staff and \$6 for students. Call 777-2551 for more information.

The next production in Theatre USC's "Approaching the New Millennium" series will be the comedy *On The Verge*, directed by Ann Dreher.

On The Verge will run from Oct. 17 through Oct. 26 at Longstreet Theatre. Tickets are available at the Longstreet box office.

Site of the Day



CONCERT CALENDAR

- **Jeb Loy Nichols**, TBA, Sept. 27, Manifest Discs and Tapes
- **Steve Wynn**, TBA, Oct. 1, Elbow Room
- **The Rolling Stones w/ Blues Traveler**, TBA, Oct. 10, Ericsson Stadium (Charlotte, NC)
- **Hanzel und Gretel w/ Sister Machine Gun**, TBA, Oct. 11, Rockafellas
- **Reba McEntire w/ Brooks & Dunn**, 7:30 p.m., Oct. 16, Carolina Coliseum
- **Fleetwood Mac**, TBA, Nov. 14, Charlotte Coliseum (Charlotte, NC)

ETC. BRIEFS

Red Cross offers disaster courses

The South Carolina chapter of the American Red Cross will hold disaster courses during the month of Sept. The next one is Local Disaster Volunteer. The class is scheduled for Wed. from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Classes are free and open to the public. Call 540-1215 for more information.

State Fair enters its 128th year

The State Fair has something for everyone from bands to racing pigs. It will be held at the fairgrounds from Oct. 2 through the 12th.

Governor's Cup held in Columbia

You can run where the Olympians run. The 25th Annual Governor's Cup 8K and half-marathon is set for Oct. 18. The race starts in front of the State House and ends in the Horseshoe. Stop by the student life lobby to pick up a registration form.

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