Theatre review

DRACULA...delightfully batty

Bats, bats and bloodsuckers are all too real in Baltimore and being brought up on Bela Lugosi's "Dracula"... had planned to skip the stage production.

Dennis Rosa's production of Bram Stoker's world famous novel "Dracula" now playing at the Mechanic Theatre can only be described as delightfully, deliciously batty with a very proper, sinister bloodsucking Count Dracula played magnificently by Raul Julia.

What makes this elegant production so funny that it evokes belly laughs and smiles throughout the evening is the austere black and white sets designed by Edward Gorey with just a touch of red somewhere... like a red rose in a vase or a red flower on a white gown.

Gorey is the writer - illustrator who has written more than 50 books using the black and white theme looking at a world that is curious, doubtful, beastly, deranged and loathsome.

The setting of "Dracula" is in rural Purley, England in the late 1920's. The ghostly changing lighting effects, the eerie background music, the howling of wolfs and the swooping of bats is turned from horror into laughter by the exaggerated, melodramatic acting by a splendid cast.

Count Dracula

The play follows the basic "Dracula" story.

Dr. Seward's lovely young daughter, Lucy (Margaret Whitton) seems to be suffering from loss of blood and even after transfusions awakens with two little marks on her throat which could not have been put there by a safety pin.

Her fiancee Jonathan (Nick Stannard) visits and is concerned because she can't stand to kiss him.

Father Seward calls in a Belgian specialist, Dr. Von Helsing, who immediately discovers a vampire is sucking the blood and destroying her soul.

Suspician falls on Renfield (John Long) a lunatic patient of Dr. Seward who eats flies and is clearly possessed by something, being sane and insane at the same time.

They're able to prove that their mysterious neighbor Count Dracula is the werewolf who is claiming Lucy. His sudden appearances and disappearances make him suspect. They discover he flew to England from his native Transylvania in an airplane with six coffins of dirt so that he can retire during the daytime and have plenty of poor victims to feast on at night.

Gorey's curtain starts the play off. More than 40 bats can be seen in the design of the fence, post, statues.

As the curtain opens on Dr. Seward's library in Act I, bat designs are all over the set on the door panels, archew, chair coverings, book covers.

When Lucy makes her first entrance, her butterfly pleated dress is made in the shape of bat wings.

The prim maid Miss Wells (Victoria Page) in her black and white uniform resembles an old bat.

So help me... at this point, my fears of horror disappeared and I either chuckled or smiled throughout the rest of the play as more and more surprises unfolded.

Raul Julia as Count Dracula pranced around the stage in a black velvet suit using his cape like bat wings.

In the second act, Lucy's boudoir goes from a silver headboard of bat wings to white and silver bat wallpaper.

Dennis Rosa has skillfully directed an excellent cast presenting a "Dracula" that is seductive and humorous that will appear to everyone from 8 - 80.

Raul Julia lived up to promise by being horny, hungry and sexy his eyes, merry like that of a mischievous little boy. The audience gave him spontaneous curtain calls which is unusual for Baltimore.

David Hurst won praise from the audience for his portrayal as the double talking, double taking Dr. Von Helsing.

Equally good was the lunatic Renfield (John Long). Give yourself a theatre treat and take a friend, a scary friend and see this "Dracula". You'll enjoy.

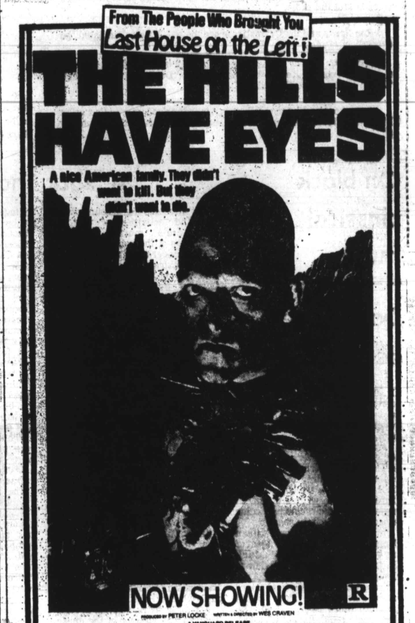
MORE WHAT'S HAPPENING

..Yvonne Green who sang last night with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra at lake Clifton is the choir director for the Voices of Psalmist and of the New Psalmist Baptist church pastored by the Rev. Walter S. Thomas.

She is a graduate of Frostburg State College where she studied with Sara Piece; she also studied at Peabody Institute. A singer since the age of eight, she is founder of the Voices of Frstburg State College and the Voices of Psalmist. The combined choir she directs numbers 100 with many parents and children as members.

Linda Clifford gave a benefit concert for Bay College Wednesday night at Coppin State. It was standing room only and she received a standing ovation for her hit "Run Away Love" and "If My Friends Could See Me Now". She created quite a stir when she arrived on campus in a silver blue Rolls Royce.

..The Bureau of Recreation's Performing Arts Theatre presents the Tempo Dance Company in "Visions" tonight, Friday at 7:30 p.m. at Green Spring Junior High.



What's Happening

Your taxes and the arts

By Ida Peters

Oliver Patrick Scott's article, "Cultural identify . . . is the reservoir of our genius" in this month's AURA Magazine, a publication for the arts, puts his finger on a very important problem that exists in our community.

He talks about how the faculty of the Department of Arts of Morgan State University has been able to achieve a delicate balance between challenging their students and supporting them.

The article also points out that the history of state and city support of Morgan reveals great indifference and he is curous about the manner in which awards are meted out by the local arts agency.

For example, he wants to know what percentage of total funds have gone to black artists? Has the distribution of awards been spread out among artists of the metropolitan area without respect to direct or indirect cronyism? Was respect for ethenic pride considered in awarding the recent commission for the sculpture of Thurgood Marshall?

Good questions Oliver Patrick Scott.

There is a difference between private endowments and public taxpayers money. And in the City of Baltimore with almost 61 percent black population, we do pay taxes... all kinds. cigarettes, gas, sales you name it, we pay it.

Which brings us to the New Theatre Festival TNT coming to downtown Mount Vernon Square June 12 - 18. It will host over 150 performances by theatre companies and individual theatre performing artists from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Japan and throughout the United States.

Now this whole experience is being sponsored by your money and mine. The New Theatre Festival is being made possible in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Mayrland Arts Council, The Maryland Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy, the Mayor's Office of Manpower Resources and with the assistance of The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Art and Culture.

The question is . . . are the black communities of Baltimore and Maryland being given fair share representation?

Jennifer Nelson formerly with Living Stage in D.C. and Barbara Ann Teer's National Black Theatre from Harlem are coming. Tokenism.

The Black community of Baltimore has more Alternative Theatre groups than you can shake a stick at and most of them have found exposure on the pages of the AFRO. Why are they not visible to the white community?

We sweat blood to pay taxes and it's time some of these taxes were used for the total community. . . and if not, why not?

The Mechanic Theatre is alive and well downtown despite the subway drilling, inconvenience of parking and traffic jams.

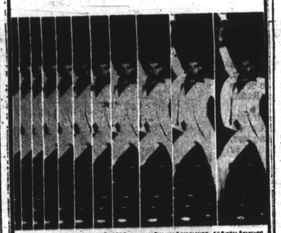
On a gorgeous May day 1,000 subscribers turned out of have Mayor William Donald Schaefer welcome Philip Langner the Mechanic's new producer who in turn introduced a tantalizing new series for 1978 - 79 with subscription tickets including free parking.

The beauty of Hopkins Plaza was not marred by the sparkling fountain . . . it just made it hard to hear Tony Randall who will open the fall season with "The Music Man", on September 5.

Also on hand was Lynn Redgrave of "Hellzapoppin'" fame who will open in George Bernard Shaw's "Misalliance" on September 25.

Other subcription plays include Rex Harrison and Claudette Colbert in "The Kingfisher"; Deborah Kerr in "The Last of Mrs. Chaney"; the musicals "The Wiz" and I Love My Wife" and Neil Simon's "Chapter Two".

The Fever is Spreading



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All that jazz...

Prysock...good show!

As usual, it was ladies' day at the Left Bank Jazz Society session last week, when Arthur Prysock was on hand to do his chores.

Have been waiting for someone to tell me that Arthur was a bit under the weather, had a cold, sore throat or something, for sadly I must relate that his voice was definitely not up to par.

Have been listening to that magnificent instrument since the days he sang with Buddy Johnson band during the middle 1940s. Have watched the ebb and flow of his ascendancy and slide, resurgence and peak.

'Course Arthur is evidently aware that he can't reach those notes like he once did, for he worked the mike - pulling it away on those high notes he couldn't reach.

Nonetheless, the performance was staisfying to those gathered at the Famous Ballroom, for he exuded his usuall charismatic charm, enough to have the women lining up in the aisles for just a touch or a kiss from the golden - throated one.

Shan't attempt to evaluate the show as a jazz concert—it wasn't. Rather, it was a transported night club revue.

Expected to see chorus girls sashaying onstage at any moment, for it seemed to be a transplanted revue that would do credit to Las Vegas or any other place that features night club talent.

Even the format was nightclub oriented. For the first 20 minutes, the trio alone did a bit. They returned after a short intermisson, to do about 10 more minutes before the Lorelels, a female singing duo came on for their stint.

They displayed admirable voices, well into the genre of backup vocalists. You knew they were there to provide accompaniment to Prysock, although they had fantastic voices on their own.

At this point, Red Prysock appeared, and to his credit, plunged right in and blew his horn. Seemed he wanted to prove that he was a jazz tenor sax man, and given a chance — proved it.

That lasted for just about two numbers, before he just had to grab the mike and launch into a comedic tirade. Humorous at times, but misplaced in a concert setting.

Then — the master appeared. He was singing off stage, using a wireless mike — and the women went slightly mad. He delved immediately into a blues bag, coming up with the old one, "Going to Chicago Blues."

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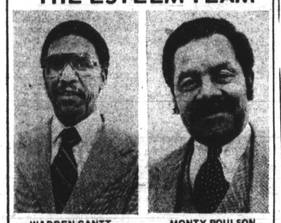

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A call from...

The Spinners

By Vashti McKenzie

There are not too many things you count on in this world. But, you can always count on The Spinners.

The Spinners are on their way to an exclusive summer appearance at the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, June 2.

Pervis Jackson, the owner of that magnificent deep resonant voice talked about the group's activities from their Detroit office this week.

"The Best of the Spinners" album is out and is too hot to trot. A new single is just about to be released entitled "If You Want To Do A Dance". And, if that's not enough, Thom Bell is producing another album with the group, due out later this summer.

The demand for the Spinners is high. They spend a lot of time on the road and Jackson said that this is the first time in seven years he's spent a birthday at home.

The natal day is May 17 and he added cooly "I guess that's why I'm full of a lot of bull."

Of course he's referring to his astrological sign, Astro, The Bull.

"We're still very active in the community," said Jackson. "We just awarded the Third Annual Spinners scholarship earlier this year in Cherry Hill N.J. to a young man majoring in accounting. We do a lot of other charitable activities. We might even do another softball game while we're in town."

In a previous visit to Painters Mill, The Spinners played radio personalities in a benefit softball game.

A man of steel, Jackson never gets tired traveling on the road.

"I can't say that I don't get depressed. But I never get tired of it," he said. "I just keep in mind what we've got to do. Each of us counts on the other members and we pull everything together."

And, he never gets nervous before a show.

"I always get nervous after the show," he said laughingly. "When we come out to take our bows and wait for the explosion we hope will happen, that's when I get nervous."

And it always does because you can always count on a super show from the Spinners.

John Edwards the newest Spinner has been with the group almost two years. Jackson says that he has increased the group's stage presence. There's more range and more energy.

You haven't lived until you've heard Edwards sing. He has the kind of voice that can make you scream, cry or shout depending upon your personality.

For those interested ladies, yes, Edwards is tall, dark and handsome. He's a Capricorn and spends a lot of time relaxing in front of the TV, a movie screen or getting into music. And, (hint, hint) he's a good cook.

"Anyone who can follow directions can be a gourmet cook," he said. "I don't do it all the time, just as a form of relaxation."

"The guys are really good people," he said. "I can't ever say too much about them. The Spinners are really fantastic people to work with in and outside the music business."

While in the area the Spinners will be in the Maryland countryside visiting their thoroughbred horse, Lady Spinner. Remember that name. In a year or two she could be winning at Pimlico

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Will Jim Brown 'get The Slams?' Actor and former football star Jim Brown was convicted on a misdemeanor battery charge for beating and choking a golfing partner during a match in south Los Angeles last year and faces sentencing on June 28. He could get six months in jail and a $1,000 fine. Above he's shown in the 1973 MGM film "The Slams."

TV watching

By Vanessa Johnson

Friday

The Osmond Brothers: Bob Hope, Jimmie Walker, the Dallas Cowgirls and singers Crystal Gayle, Andy Gibb and the Knudsen Brothers are guest tonight. 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. - ABC.

CPO Sharkey: Sharkey considers giving Natalie the old heave - ho when his girl friend of eight years decides it's time to get married. 8:30 - 9:00 p.m. - NBC.

Midnight Special: An all disco with Wolfman Jack and Donna Summer who are the hosts. Performers are Village People, Love and Kisses, Paul Jabara, Brooklyn Dreams and Hot. 1:00 - 2:30 a.m. - NBC.

Saturday

..Fat Albert: The evils of nacotics are spelled out by Bill Cosby. 12:00 - 12:30 p.m. - CBS.

Soul Train: Guest today are Lou Rawls, The Ritchie Family and the Soul Train Gang. 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Channel 11.

American Bandstand: An all disco show features Donna Summer ("Once Uon a Time," "Last Dance") and Brooklyn Dreams. 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. - Channel 7.

Blackpoint: This afternoon's discussion focuses on urban renewal and historical preservation. Guests include Rosetta Kerr, associate director of Housing, Health and Welfre for the Urban League. 12 : 30 - 1 :00 p.m. nnel 13.

Mata: A discussion of th problems facing black lawyers. Participants include attorney A. Dwight Petit, president of the Monumental Bar Assoc. - 1:00 - 1:30 p.m. - Channel 13.

Saturday Night Live: Host O.J. Simpson appears ina "Saturday Night Fever" takeoff featuring John Belushi as a smurai; and Ashford and Simpson sing "Don't Cost You Nothing". 11:30 - 1 :00 a.m. - NBC.

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