

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Dracula

Bram Stoker, adapted by Nick Lane

Blackeyed Theatre

Derby Theatre

17–21 September 2024

It's exactly 100 years since *Dracula* stepped onto the stage for the first time, making his debut at Derby's old Grand Theatre. The character has had a longer life than the venue, which closed in 1950.

To mark the centenary, Blackeyed Theatre is touring a new version of Bram Stoker's tale and depicts a Count vastly different from Hamilton Deane's original vampire. Gone are the dinner suit and the opera cloak. The fangs made famous by Christopher Lee in the Hammer horror franchise are nowhere to be seen, as adapter and director Nick Lane aims to offer something unique.

*Dracula* is a typical Blackeyed piece of theatre: stripped back as much as possible but pleurably inventive, with a passionate ensemble putting emphasis on the words more than the action.

One of the problems of Lane's production is that it tries to explain what is happening inside the body of *Dracula*'s victims. Not only is blood being drawn from the neck, but something enters the victim's bloodstream, taking over their personality. But the vampire doesn't sink his teeth into his first target until about an hour into the production. By that time, some of the audience have endured a long, wordy revelation of the human struggle against vampirism.

Lane decided not to make *Dracula* "purely a bad guy" and has three actors playing the lead character. In the novel, *Dracula* gets younger as he feeds on blood, and Lane's idea of having different actors playing the Count is his way of dramatising the de-ageing process.

But the concept means *Dracula* loses the ability to frighten: it's difficult to understand why Jonathan Harker would be terrified of being locked up in *Dracula*'s castle in Transylvania, and there is little indication of why women would be attracted to *Dracula* and fall under his spell.

Despite that, there is plenty to admire in the production. The cast of six play multiple roles, effortlessly moving from one character to another. They also take it in turns to be narrators as they relate the story through letters, diary entries and newspaper articles.

Maya-Nika Bewley, David Chafer, Richard Keightley, Pelé Kelland-Beau, Marie Osman and Harry Rundle all raise the stakes with committed performances. Osman in particular gives a thrilling display as Lucy Westenra, being transformed from an independent, modern-thinking woman into a possessed vampire whose charms have to be resisted.

According to the programme, Lane wanted to tell a story where the audience get what they expect and more. Anyone who knows Stoker's version of *Dracula* will recognise the author's genius in Lane's production. But the Blackeyed Theatre offering, at two hours and 20 minutes, seems long and unwieldy, leading to a lack of tension, fear and pizzazz. It's clearly *Dracula* for intellectuals.

*Dracula* was received well by a medium-sized audience on the night I saw it. But I couldn't help thinking, if you'll excuse the pun, that it could do with a bit more bite.

**Reviewer:** [Steve Orme](#)