



[ physical theatre ]

**DARREN & HEATHER STEVENSON**  
founding directors

389 GREGORY ST. UNIT 400  
ROCHESTER, NY 14620

**(585) 415-PUSH (7874)**  
**CHITCHAT@PUSHTHEATRE.ORG**  
**WWW.PUSHTHEATRE.ORG**

## BRINGING CHILDREN TO PUSH'S DRACULA?

### A NOTE TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Welcome to *PUSH Physical Theatre's DRACULA*! We are so glad you are about to take this journey with us. With so much attention paid to the vampires of popular culture in recent years you may be wondering if you should bring your children to *PUSH's DRACULA*. Whether this play is appropriate for children will depend largely on the child but here are a few thoughts to help you make a decision. Darren and I are the parents of two grown boys so we have faced the same sorts of decisions many times. The question we often asked ourselves was, "what teaching moments are here?". With that in mind we have also listed a few conversation starters to talk about the big picture themes of *DRACULA* in the car on the way home.

*PUSH's DRACULA* deals with mature subject matter. There is no nudity, coarse language or sex. However, the play does deal with both love (*The Man* and *The Maiden*) and lust (*Dracula's* crude substitute). There is a fair amount of stylized violence but no blood and gore. This is a great opportunity to discuss the level of trust, self-discipline and hours of practice the actors engage in so that they can perform stage combat night after night without injury.

This isn't a jump-scare kind of show but there are some moments with masked characters and scenes in the asylum that younger children may find disturbing. If this were a movie it might be rated PG-13. Most teens will have seen scarier things and some tweens will likely benefit from sitting with mom or dad to help provide context from time to time. If you are undecided about whether your child should attend consider showing them the short promo video: <https://youtu.be/7kzsBnnCS6g> If they don't respond well to that, it's a good indicator that *Dracula* might be a bit much.

For the opinion of a journalist who took two children to see the 2009 version of *DRACULA*, we have included a *Kids Out and About* review by Deborah Ross on page 3.

The cast will also be in the lobby shortly after each production to greet you. PUSH cast members are approachable and kind. Please feel free to introduce your child to the cast members.

### LEARNING MOMENTS

*PUSH's DRACULA* is loosely based on Bram Stokers 1897 novel of the same title. The story is told from the perspective of *Renfield* and occasionally *Dracula* himself whose personal voices are missing from the original text. Consider reading the short novel ahead of time and ask your child to compare differences between the text and the play.

The movement showcases a variety of theatrical disciplines including acting, mime, modern dance and acrobatic partnering. These techniques are used together to create the medium of physical theatre. The creative process began with the performers reading Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, improvising movement based on that theme and sharing ideas with Danny Hoskins in order for him to create the first draft of the script. The script enabled the performers to develop the movement into a more developed form which resulted in plenty of script rewrites (this is not a short process). As the play takes shape the process becomes slightly less collaborative and more directed. However, for PUSH even the direction is a collaboration between Darren and Heather Stevenson, Virginia Monte and Danny Hoskins. Each director brings different skills to various parts of the play. As this process is happening a creative team begins working on video projection, sound design, costumes, props and lighting. There are many conflicting needs. For instance, a costume may look beautiful but the



performer is unable to execute an acrobatic movement while wearing it. Everyone must be mature enough to resolve conflicts and compromise appropriately.

The script uses complex vocabulary for the character, *Renfield*, desperate to warn the townspeople of *Dracula's* imminent arrival. Rick Staropoli's *Renfield* is, in fact, the only performer to speak on stage; voicing both himself and all the other characters. This leads us to question how much of the drama is real and how much is inside *Renfield's* fevered mind.

Mental illness is a theme throughout. *PUSH's DRACULA* deals with mental struggles from a Victorian point of view. It may be interesting to discuss differences between the way the suffering were treated 130 years ago versus how we treat mental illness today.

*Dracula* is a tale of love, loss and revenge. Experiencing this performance may be a wonderful opportunity for you and your child to have a discussion about self-control, rage and the consequences of our actions. Pop culture notions of love, romance and vengeance that are seen in Hollywood movies, music and TV often present relationships unrealistically. *PUSH's DRACULA* shows three kinds of aspiration from the characters of *Dracula*, *The Man* and *Renfield*. These aspirations lead to very different actions from each character resulting in both harmful and helpful outcomes.

The underlying theme is fear; particularly fear of the unknown. Children often deal with a great deal more anxiety than most adults realize. We have a tendency to minimize the fears of young people whilst justifying our own. A great fear is that of the unknown. Whether we fear the dark, the opinions of others or an uncertain future, the first step to dealing with fear is to understand it. In *PUSH's DRACULA*, the title character remains unseen and unnamed for the first part of the play. This makes the other characters more afraid, unable to identify exactly what is haunting (or hunting) them.

## CAR TALK

### CONVERSATION STARTERS ON THE WAY HOME FROM DRACULA. SOME FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN SOME FOR OLDER.

1. Was *Dracula* born an evil man? If not, what events changed him? Is violence ever justified? Have you ever felt so angry that you wanted to hurt yourself or someone else?
2. Is there anyone in your life who you find an angry person? A bully, perhaps? Do you think he/she was born a spiteful person? What events in his life could have changed him/her?
3. What is different from the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *PUSH's DRACULA*? How did the changes in plot, character and style affect your understanding of the work? Does engaging with source material in different ways help you to understand more about it?
4. There were two dances featuring the character of *The Maiden*; one dance between her and the man she loves and one with *Dracula*. A relationship, or friendship built on kindness and trust feels different from a relationship built on selfishness. Did the dances feel different from each other?
5. *Renfield's* feelings towards *The Maiden* change throughout the play. At first he seems to want to use her to bargain with *Dracula*. Later he wants to protect her from *Dracula*. What changes his feeling?
6. *PUSH's Dracula* uses primarily physical storytelling rather than spoken language. Are there parts of the play that you didn't understand? Do you have different opinions about the plot or the meaning of the play than other audience members? Is it OK to see different things from others in an art-form.
7. Did you learn any new words in the play? Can you use context to try to understand them? Try looking them up in a dictionary and see if you were right.
8. The actors often played multiple roles. How do you think they must have prepared to make fast switches from one character to another? Do you think a lot of planning was involved to change costumes quickly?
9. Some of the actors appeared to hurt each other emotionally and physically. If this was real do you think they would be able to rehearse, travel, and perform together repeatedly? How might sound effects, physical stunts, slow/fast motion and lighting effects help the actors perform stage combat. Do you think the rehearsal time for stage combat was shorter, longer or the same as the time taken to rehearse dance scenes?
10. Many of the characters appeared to be very afraid, even when *Dracula* wasn't on stage. What do you think they were afraid of? What makes you afraid? Is it worse to fear something unknown or known?

*“Let no man pull you low enough to hate him.”*

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

# REVIEW OF DRACULA FROM PUSH PHYSICAL THEATRE

## Halloween for the Thinking Teen

By Debra Ross

I remember Halloween as a traditional rite-of-passage opportunity for teenagers, and from what I observe from my friends' teenaged kids, that hasn't changed. Who can walk through a graveyard on Halloween night? Watch *Night of the Living Dead* without screaming? Take a date to the local haunted hayride? These Halloween traditions let maturing kids test their boundaries safely, proving to their friends—and themselves—that they can take it.

Halloween “scary” activities tend to fall into three main categories: gory, startling, and eerie. Most of the haunted hayrides and houses fall squarely into the “startling” category: Their aim is to frighten you by jumping out at you and yelling the equivalent of “boo.” The problem is, you get to expect that someone is going to jump at you from behind the next corner, and such experiences tend to get predictable. Those that aim to be truly horrifying to the thrill-seeker tend to shade off into gore, to disgust us, rather than attempting to reach deeper—to jangle our nerves, to disquiet our very souls.

The PUSH Physical Theatre adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* juxtaposes the beauty of the best within human beings with our profound fear that we will succumb to the temptation of evil. In so doing, it creates an audience experience quite unlike anything you have probably seen before.

I sometimes describe PUSH performances as intensely controlled ballet that is designed to illustrate core human experiences. This is part of the reason PUSH's *Dracula* is so provoking: The performers conflate the profoundly beautiful control they exert over their own bodies with the profoundly terrifying concepts of control lurking beneath the surface of *Dracula*, with psychologically jarring results.

I suspect that the reason few performers attempt the task of being truly terrifying in this way is that it requires an enormous amount of thought...on the part of the performers, sure, but on the part of the audience, too. We Americans in the 21st century seem to be more inclined to sit back passively and “be entertained” than to invest our minds in the experience. Watching *Dracula* is demanding, but for those who are willing to think about what they are watching, it is intensely rewarding.

The producers of *Dracula* warn that it is not appropriate for young children. This is true, and there are several reasons for this, though not the reasons we've come to expect--there is no “adult” language, or gore, or violence, or nudity. But *Dracula* demands a level of processing and reflection about issues that people younger than about 13 or so have not yet encountered, or are only beginning to encounter: issues of devotion to good and the temptation of evil, of faith and reason, of sexuality and, mostly, of death, death of the body and of the soul. I determined in advance that my own kids (girls, ages 8 and 10) were probably too young to see *Dracula*, so I borrowed another family with an 11-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl, so I could see what their reactions were.

The 11-year-old found it very frightening, because he is a smart kid who paid attention and thought hard about what he was seeing. On the other hand, I know ‘tweens for whom this would zoom right over their heads, and they wouldn't be at all disturbed. What would have worried my own kids most would have been seeing the very convincingly-conveyed horror experienced by the main character, Renfield.

For teens who think, especially for those who are starting to grapple with the themes portrayed in *Dracula*, this is the perfect Halloween experience. Make sure you read Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, or a summary of the book, beforehand; it will definitely enhance the experience.

Though the show is really designed for adults, parents who take their teens will have fascinating dinner table discussions for some time afterward. And you'll have proved to them that you, too, are old enough to see it.