

# PUSH Physical Theatre Asks: What is Evil?

By Tracy H. Kroft

IN DEFINING THEIR ART FORM, HEATHER AND Darren Stevenson, husband and wife founders of PUSH Physical Theatre, say it's "like regular theatre ... but more painful." PUSH Physical Theatre is interdisciplinary—combining aspects of modern dance, corporeal and illusionary mime, acrobatics, nontraditional partnering and physical acting. Along with awe-inspiring physical feats, this company also engages the audience with powerful storytelling.

So powerful is their work, in fact, that Danny Hoskins—actor, director, teacher and playwright—had wanted to collaborate with them for a long time. Says Hoskins, "They are so amazing at what they do, I just wanted to be a part of it." He and Darren Stevenson had been bouncing around ideas of what that collaboration might look like for a while.

Darren had his first exposure to professional theatre at the Theatre Royal in Plymouth England at the age of 10. His parents took him to see *Dracula*—something that, to them, didn't seem could be as scary on-stage as it would be in a movie. Stevenson was absolutely terrified and gripped by the performance. It was that moment that would influence him to become a performer. And it was that very moment he was remembering when he struck upon the perfect vehicle for collaboration with Hoskins.

Thus, *Dracula* was born. The result of this collaboration between the three is a movement theatre piece, created by the Stevensons and their company, and a spoken text piece, written by Hoskins, which are interdependent. The goal is to make sure the spoken piece and the movement piece are equally important to each other, and that neither piece can stand alone. According to Darren Stevenson, this is groundbreaking from the perspective of the equal integration of the movement and the text.

This version of *Dracula* is not an adaptation, per se. Instead, Hoskins has kept the essence of the story, but is telling it through the eyes of one specific character. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Renfield, a patient in an insane asylum, was one of several characters in the story. In this version, Hoskins has written the story as Renfield's experience of Dracula. As the story unfolds, the audience is forced to try to figure out if what is happening is real or just in the mind of a mad man.

Written in 1897, *Dracula*, as a scary entity, has lasted over 100 years. Hoskins and the Stevensons wondered why, and decided that the story of Dracula taps into the human emotion of being scared in general. This production is PUSH's way of asking the audience the question, "What scares you?" Stevenson thinks that Western society is moving toward relativism. People are asking themselves whether there is absolute good and absolute evil. *Dracula* asks that question. Darren Stevenson says, "We're not preachers or politicians. Our task is not



Darren Stevenson, as Dracula, hungers over the body of "The Woman," portrayed by Heather Stevenson. The Stevensons, PUSH Physical Theatre's Co-Founders, premiere *Dracula* at Geva's Nextstage.

## Dracula

PUSH PHYSICAL THEATRE • GEVA THEATRE CENTER'S NEXTSTAGE  
75 WOODBURY BOULEVARD, ROCHESTER

- Oct. 23–Nov. 8, 2009
- Visit [www.pushtheatre.org](http://www.pushtheatre.org) for video previews, updates and blogs
- For tickets, call 585.232.GEVA or visit [www.gevatheatre.org](http://www.gevatheatre.org)

to deliver the answer but to ask the question."

PUSH's *Dracula* is visceral storytelling—based in human emotion, connection, and need. From start to finish, Heather Stevenson likens this piece of movement theatre to an amusement park thrill ride. The audience "buys their tickets and gets on what they think is going to be a Disney children's ride, but we're delivering Space Mountain®."

Enjoy the ride. ☺



Darren Stevenson was awarded an individual artist grant from the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester for the choreography of *Dracula*. This grant was made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency.