



Review: 'Dracula' an intriguing audio theater experience



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There is something extremely intriguing about the concept of theater of the ear, like the radio serials “Bulldog Drummond,” “The Shadow” or “Hopalong Cassidy” from the 1930s to early '50s.

The L.A. Theatre Works performed the immortal vampire tale “Dracula” at the Lied Center for Performing Arts Friday night. The company's productions of audio theater are not quite the same thing as the programs broadcast during the

Golden Age of Radio.

The company certainly pays homage to the tradition with a riveting performance of the Bram Stoker classic: actors standing on a relatively bare stage, facing microphones and delivering their lines to a seemingly vacant audience, while sound effects -- pages rustling, bells ringing, doors shutting -- are being manually performed behind them.

But there are also a few additions that the company has included. The actors are in costume, and there are taped sound effects and music, as well as a large projection screen.

While it may seem unlikely that an audience can become absorbed in a production in which the actors perform to stand-up mics with little physical relation to each other, this company swiftly negates that.

Very quickly, the passion and dramatic intensity of the cast remove those doubts. Friday's audience was swept up into the force of the presentation, making a leap between what we saw on the stage and what we started "seeing" within our minds.

The proficiency and skill of the L.A. Theatre Works actors is aptly displayed by how well they verbally and emotionally interact with their fellow performers. While there are instances of physical contact, the vast majority of the performance is played directly to the audience, but there still is a communication and exchange of feeling between the performers that is impressive and often breathtaking.

The entire cast is splendid, including Skip Pipo as the anguished and tormented Renfield. Not surprisingly, the production's two leads, Nicholas Hormann as Doctor Van Helsing and Patrick Wenk-Wolff as Dracula, are outstanding, utilizing intense emotions and verbal intonation to be the focal points of the production.