

PLAY IN THE PARK  
CINCINNATI **HOUSE**

# PROLOGUE

OCT. – DEC. 2023

## A THEATRICAL FEAST.



MOE & JACK ROUSE and  
RANDOLPH WADSWORTH present

**CLYDE'S**

By LYNN NOTTAGE

**LATE NITE  
CATECHISM**

By VICKI QUADE  
and MARIPAT DONOVAN

FIRST FINANCIAL BANK presents

**A CHRISTMAS  
CAROL**

By CHARLES DICKENS  
Adapted by BLAKE ROBISON

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## ABOUT PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE is the pre-show publication of Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. It is published as a service to Playhouse season subscribers, donors and others.

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## JOIN THE AMAZING WOMEN WHO HAVE MADE A POWERFUL IMPACT AT THE PLAYHOUSE!

By Kendra Struthers

No auditions required! You are invited to become a Leading Lady at the Playhouse. An amazing group of women, the Leading Ladies collectively sponsor one of the Playhouse productions and enjoy four fun-filled events each season. **Invite your friends or make new friends** and enjoy our spectacular new state-of-the-art complex with great spaces for creating and presenting theatre.

Women coming together make a powerful impact: over the past 10 years, the Leading Ladies have raised over \$900,000, sponsored eight productions and provided funding for the Leading Ladies Loo, while having fun and learning about theatre. This is all thanks to the passionate women who collectively participated through 1,431 Leading Ladies memberships during the last decade.

This year — our eleventh — the Leading Ladies will sponsor the production of *Dracula*. Published in 1897, *Dracula* had instant success as the story of the vampire that fed on the blood of mortals in a never-ending search to sustain his immortal life. In this version, Vanessa Severo (author and star of *Frida...A Self Portrait*) and Playhouse Associate Artistic Director Joanie Schultz have created a highly theatrical adaptation that pulses with humor, humanity and blood-curdling thrills.

With the final dress rehearsal of *Dracula* as our main attraction, we have planned three other events that will give you the opportunity to engage in conversation with Blake Robison and other production staff, go behind the scenes, and learn about the latest in theatre production. All events will include delicious food, signature cocktails and good times with a great group of ladies.

Leading Ladies membership starts at the \$500 Starlet level. Joining is easy: just email "Yes, I am in!" to [kendra.struthers@cincyplay.com](mailto:kendra.struthers@cincyplay.com), or join and pay online at [ticketing.cincyplay.com/donate/contribute1](http://ticketing.cincyplay.com/donate/contribute1). Pledge now and pay any time before June 24, 2024. We look forward to welcoming you as a Leading Lady!

If you have any questions, please contact Kendra Struthers, Director of Donor Relations, at (513) 977-2024 or [kendra.struthers@cincyplay.com](mailto:kendra.struthers@cincyplay.com).

MOE & JACK ROUSE and  
RANDOLPH WADSWORTH present  
**CLYDE'S**

By LYNN NOTTAGE  
Directed by TIMOTHY DOUGLAS

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre  
**OCT. 14 – NOV. 5, 2023**

**COMMUNITY.  
CONNECTION.  
REDEMPTION.**

By Russell Florence Jr.



Photo of Maiesha McQueen on this page and on the cover by Tony Arrasmith/Arrasmith & Associates.

Lynn Nottage's *Clyde's* intimately, humorously and potently examines the lives of the formerly incarcerated attempting to begin anew. Set inside a Reading, Pennsylvania, truck stop diner, the play uses themes of connection, survival and second chances to pepper its account of ex-cons seeking redemption while mastering the intricacies of making the perfect sandwich. As the bullying, demanding, titular owner rules the roost, squabbles arise but confession ultimately opens a portal to greater understanding.

Spotlighted in *The New York Times* regarding *Clyde's*, Nottage said, "*Clyde's* is a play about people trapped in a liminal space. It is also about community, healing, creativity, mindfulness and forgiveness." While exploring the community that forms inside the diner, Nottage directly invites a larger conversation about America's prison system. The United States has the highest incarceration rate, not only of any Western democracy, but also in the world. Further, the U.S. incarceration rate is not only high, but it's also highly unequal. Prison populations disproportionately comprise African American and Hispanic men, especially men who dropped out of high school. Nottage's script brings to the forefront the fact that men and women behind bars are not merely statistics but human beings deserving of redemption.

This subject matter is close to Nottage's heart. In an interview with the Art for Justice Fund, she discussed its personal relevance. "My father worked in corrections in the 1960s and '70s, and my brother is a D.A. I have family members who spent the majority of life incarcerated," Nottage said. "And so my life in some ways revolves around this system that has really been designed to punish Black men."

The content of *Clyde's* resonates not only with Nottage, but audiences across the U.S. as well. It was the most produced play in the 2022-23 American playgoing season. In an interview with *The Los Angeles Times*, Nottage reflected on the momentum surrounding *Clyde's*, particularly in the post-pandemic era. "I'm always surprised when the work is embraced," she

said. "I feel like *Clyde's* is simple but also complicated. In some ways, it feels like the right play to be bringing us back out of COVID, because it is about people who have been through a difficult time. But it's also about resilience and optimism and ephemerality. To be part of a community, to be working, to be alive, to be all those things that when you're incarcerated you don't get to do with the fullness of who you are because you are caged."

Throughout an acclaimed career that includes two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama (*Ruined*, *Sweat*), Nottage continues to hold a mirror to society with an engaging urgency, which makes her playwrighting eye-opening and relatable. Kate Whoriskey, who directed the aforementioned Pulitzer-winning plays, spoke about Nottage's attributes in an interview with NPR. "Lynn is one of our most celebrated writers, and I think she has three major skill sets," Whoriskey explained. "One is she's incredible with character and also she's great with structure. And then I would say the last thing is that I think she has the ability to see into the future more than anyone I know, in terms of what the world is asking for."

Nottage is also praised by Timothy Douglas, who directs *Clyde's* for the Playhouse. "This visionary playwright expertly crafts epic tales for the stage that are accessible to contemporary audiences, in which they can 'see' themselves," said Douglas. "In addition, no matter to what heights or depths her creative vision takes us, the journey remains fully rooted in authentic truth and learning."

As she shared with *The Los Angeles Times*, Nottage feels *Clyde's* is grounded in an essential appeal to creative expression. "I think the play is very intentionally about creative expression and having room to shape your own narrative through art," Nottage said. "That is really at its core. How do you take the simple ingredients that you have in front of you and create something that is singular and special? Something that when people bite into it they understand fully who you are and you have a communion?"

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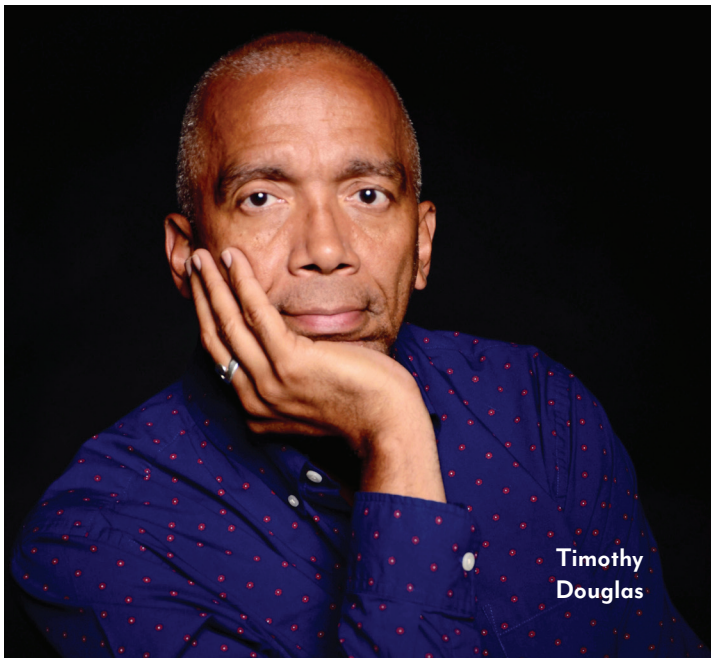
An accurate running time will be posted on our website on Oct. 13.

CONTENT ADVISORY

*Clyde's* is suitable for older teenage and adult audiences only. A crew of people recently released from prison find purpose in sandwich making while using very strong adult language and discussing mature topics including sex, substance abuse and illegal activities.

# ILLUMINATING HUMANITY AND BELIEVING IN GRACE IN *CLYDE'S*

By Russell Florence Jr.



Lynn Nottage's *Clyde's* centers on the formerly incarcerated kitchen staff at a truck stop diner on a journey of redemption. Director Timothy Douglas shares his reflections on the play and artistic vision.

## What do you view as some of the inherent strengths in or hallmarks of a Lynn Nottage work and particularly *Clyde's*?

What increasingly resonates with me from the in-depth discussions I've had with Lynn Nottage over the years is her fervent commitment to exposing the beating hearts and radiating souls of her characters. Each one of them goes through very human and often harrowing experiences, yet all emerge with their authentic resiliencies intact.

## *Clyde's* is an intimate, diverse and specific work. What are some of your priorities as director to ensure these characters resonate to the fullest?

The initial priority for me is born of the casting process. It is essential I succeed in curating an ensemble of actors who individually and collectively are committed to centering themselves in their assigned roles and allowing that to be the revealing source of their respective characters (versus creating a whole other being outside and separate from who they innately are). During the casting process I'm also looking to identify artists who can viscerally resonate to the world of the play and all its given circumstances. Once cast, my singular goal is then to make certain we are putting all our energies and focus into serving the playwright's original intent. This is mostly based on this director's subjective

perspective and interpretation, of course, but I've come to rely upon a universal if not ephemeral truth that emerges within the ensemble during the rehearsal process, which becomes our increasingly trusted rudder assuring the story's authentic navigation and reveal.

## Which themes in the script do you find the most appealing or thought-provoking?

The belief in and commitment to redemption, along with the necessary allowance for grace, and the practice of it — both with ourselves and others. Also known as forgiveness, it is required for the journey of the soul toward a genuine self-actualization.

## Why is it important for the Playhouse to continue to champion works that explore the themes you referenced earlier?

The Playhouse's primary charge, along with the that of all the U.S.'s regional theaters, is to exist as a kind of time capsule for who we collectively are — and have been — as a society. As presenters of great theatrical works, we 'bury' that collective understanding in the psyches of our audiences, who will continue to dig up those treasured ideas and emotions therein long after our productions have played their final performances. From both sides of the footlights, we will revisit those memorable moments often as a reliable measure of our progress as individuals as well as members of our communities... including and especially the global one.

## What do you want the audience to take away from *Clyde's*?

A deeper appreciation for their own slice of the bread of life, along with a curiosity and motivation to create new sandwich possibilities.

"A deeper appreciation for their own slice of the bread of life, along with a curiosity and motivation to create new sandwich possibilities."

# LATE NITE CATECHISM

By VICKI QUADE & MARIPAT DONOVAN

The Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre

**NOV. 4 – DEC. 17, 2023**

## CLASS IS IN SESSION!

By Tessa D'Errico



*Late Nite Catechism* promises a boisterous jaunt through Catholic culture in a one-woman show — part stand-up comedy and part improvisational theatre — that will be enjoyable for all. For anyone who grew up going to Catholic school, the show is a nostalgic, eccentric, yet heartfelt romp. For those less familiar with the nuances of Catholicism, the show is still a guaranteed evening of fun. And hey, you might even learn something new.

This is not the first time the Playhouse has hosted a comedy show from Chicago. The Second City visited three times in the 2010s with three different comedy reviews, including an original show written to spoof Cincinnati. Fans of The Second City will love *Late Nite Catechism's* active comedy that blends audience participation with an airtight and witty script.

Vicki Quade and Maripat Donovan developed the show in 1993 after years of working in the Chicago comedy scene. They both have backgrounds in Catholic grammar school and high school, and *Late Nite Catechism* as we know it today began as a stand-up routine about Catholic saints. As Donovan and Quade started working, Quade realized that the story they were trying to tell was not with the saints, but rather with the nuns who they grew up admiring. The show premiered in May 1993 at the Live Bait Theatre in Chicago. Thirty years later, *Late Nite Catechism* has now been produced in every U.S. state (as well as London, Dublin and Toronto) and has been running in Chicago longer than Broadway titan *The Lion King* has been running in New York.

"A strong nun is a strong teacher," Quade told *Loyola Press*. "Women will say that by example, nuns showed them how to be a strong woman, how to be in charge, that it's not a man's world. You can do whatever you

want to do in life. Many women saw nuns as positive influences in their life."

In *Late Nite Catechism*, the audience acts as the "students" in Sister's adult catechism class, pulling everyone into the action of the story. Sister rules the classroom with an iron fist. Don't get caught chewing gum, checking your phone or arriving late — you'll risk being called out by Sister for your misdoings. But you may get off easier if you have

a biblically inspired name. Sister loves those.

The show combines witty stand-up comedy and improvisational crowd work, ensuring that each performance is unique and equally enjoyable. Sister educates the audience on Catholic doctrine, such as the true definition of the Immaculate Conception, how Saint Joseph can help you sell your home and the truth about the four stages of the afterlife. The script educates while simultaneously, and with a sharp lens, finds lighthearted fun in Catholic culture. However, through all the humorous observations, puns and stories, at the core of this show is a love for growing up Catholic and all that comes with it.

It is evident that Quade and Donovan created this show to memorialize their Catholic upbringing as well as lovingly find the funny side of faith. While researching the show, Donovan learned that the Catholic Church opted out of Social Security for nuns. Past performances have raised money to support retired Sisters and, to date, have collected over \$2 million from their 10 million audience members — a number that is sure to grow.

*Late Nite Catechism* will run in the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre from Nov. 4 – Dec. 17. It is the perfect show for a friends' night out, or a class reunion activity for your Catholic high school, and promises a good time for all crowds of all different backgrounds.

Through all the humorous observations, puns and stories, at the core of this show is a love for growing up Catholic and all that comes with it.

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RUNNING TIME

An accurate running time will be posted on our website on Nov. 2.

CONTENT ADVISORY

*Late Nite Catechism* is appropriate for audiences 12 and up and contains no strong language. It does include some audience interaction and promises lots of fun.

**FIRST** first financial bank presents

# A CHRISTMAS CAROL

By CHARLES DICKENS

Adapted and Directed by BLAKE ROBISON

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre

**NOV. 24 – DEC. 30, 2023**

## A PART OF TRADITION

By Tatiana Godfrey

Video games, television shows, operas, ballet, theatre pieces: with hundreds of different versions of the story, *A Christmas Carol* is the most adapted work in the English language. Published on December 19, 1843, the book was sold out before Christmas day and, thanks to basically nonexistent copyright laws, within weeks there were at least five different theatrical adaptations being staged in Victorian playhouses. Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* garnered universal acclaim, causing even rival novelist William Thackeray (of *Vanity Fair* fame) to heap praise upon the piece. Since that fateful publishing day 180 years ago, the story of Ebenezer Scrooge has proliferated holiday culture in many different forms and versions.

What was your first experience of *A Christmas Carol*? For many, Dickens' original text is not the first point of entry into this perennial tale. Perhaps you're of a generation that remembers Lionel Barrymore reading the novella each year. Or Eleanor Roosevelt. Maybe your toe was a-tappin' to Ralph Vaughan Williams' score for a *Carol* ballet. Your favorite Scrooge might be Albert Finney. Or George C. Scott. Or maybe it's Vanessa Williams from *A Diva's Christmas Carol*, Michael Caine in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, Bill Murray from *Scrooged*, Scrooge McDuck, Mr. Magoo, or Margaret Atwood's *Scrooge Nouveau*.

Perhaps your first (or favorite) *Carol* emphasizes the stark divide between the wealthy and the impoverished. Or the theme surrounds our impact on the planet and the importance of taking care of it. Maybe your first Scrooge was meant to illustrate the significance of mental health awareness or serve as a reminder that collective action and support can bring about positive change. There's a *Carol* and a Scrooge for every sensibility and oftentimes, the adaptation reflects the culture and sensibilities of the time and place in which it is generated, each retelling offering a point of view that is specific and new.

Since 1991, Cincinnati audiences have been coming to the Playhouse for their local iteration of *A Christmas Carol*. It's become a holiday favorite. Some folks



Photo of Andrew May on this page and on the cover by Tony Arrasmith/Arrasmith & Associates.

from the region boast our Howard Dallin adaptation as their first introduction to the classic story. Their first Ebenezer Scrooge was Yusef Bulos (1991), Alan Mixon (1992 to 1996), Joneal Joplin (1997 to 2004) or Bruce Cromer (2005 to 2021). Regardless of when you first encountered this Dickensian mainstay, *A Christmas Carol* has become a beloved holiday tradition for many families, reminding them about the many lessons inherent to the holiday season. While the themes of redemption, generosity, and the spirit of Christmas are timeless, new *Carols* ensure that these themes remain relevant, relatable, and impactful to new audiences and new generations.

This season, the Playhouse is engaging in this age-old tradition of presenting a new *Carol*. The script is new; the director is new; the Scrooge is new; the theatre is new. In the brand new, state-of-the-art Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre, special effects and theatrical staging can now be executed that were not possible in the old facility. Scenery can fly in and out and audiences are closer to the action. Bruce Cromer, who played Bob Cratchit and then Ebenezer Scrooge, has retired after his 16-year tenure as the legendary miser. Taking up the mantle of this role is Andrew May, who audiences will remember as Hercule Poirot from last season's *Murder on the Orient Express*. This new adaptation is written and directed by Playhouse Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director, Blake Robison. He began writing the script over a year ago, committed to writing a faithful adaptation that remains and becomes a part of audiences' holiday traditions.

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RUNNING TIME

An accurate running time will be posted on our website on Nov. 23.

CONTENT ADVISORY

*A Christmas Carol* is suitable for all general audiences, including children ages 5 and older. Due to the full-length nature of the show, children younger than 5 cannot be admitted.



Blake Robison

Blake sat down with us to talk about the Playhouse's new *Carol*.

**For you, what is *A Christmas Carol* about?**

I think it's about redemption, and the joy of the season, and finding peace and purpose in the service of others. That's my answer. I think Dickens' answer is in Fred's speech in the first counting house scene.

There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say, Christmas among them. I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they were fellow-passengers on life's great journey, and not another race of creatures to look down upon. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!

I think that's Dickens' answer right there.

**What excites you about this story?**

I. Love. *A Christmas Carol*. There are a lot of theatre people who roll their eyes or feel like it's a thing that they have to do every year as part of

their season. But, I love seeing so many families of multiple generations come to the theatre together. You have grandparents, parents and kids all attending. I think it centers us as a community. It reminds us of what's important in life. It's this wonderful parable about a person who is at odds with all the humanity around him. He has carved out a life of loneliness and defensiveness. He's put his walls around himself. Then, he has a chance to make amends and reconnect with the world. A timeless message, to be sure, but perhaps an especially timely message in our current social environment.

**What did this adaptation process look like for you?**

You know, I've seen a lot of *A Christmas Carols* at many different theatres, not just the one that the Playhouse has done for so many years. And I hadn't gone back and read the novella in a very long time. So, of course, I started there. The idea was not to take Howard Dallin's version and nip and tuck it. It was to go back to the source material and start fresh. Obviously, the story is still the story. The characters are there. Much of the dialogue is the same, because nearly every adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* starts with Dickens. The lines that you remember, the famous lines, the ones that you look forward to as an audience member, exist in most every adaptation because they come straight from Dickens. And that is certainly the case here.

That said, every adaptation has some variances that reflect the taste and interest of the adapter and the director. So, in the version that we are premiering this season at the Playhouse, there are some tiny little scenes, that I think are lovely and meaningful and moving, that were not in the previous adaptation. They're part of the Dickens novel. They're part of the story, but the previous adapter chose to leave those out for whatever reason.

Another interesting part of the adaptation process is that some of the Dickens novel is written with dialogue, so you're using the dialogue that Dickens himself imagined would come out of these characters' mouths. And in other scenes, Dickens simply describes the action. So as the adapter, you have to create the dialogue. A good example of that is the Cratchit scene. When we first meet the Cratchit family, they're having Christmas dinner. If you go back to the Dickens novel and read that, there's very little actual dialogue. Mostly, it's in novel form; he's describing things without assigning actual lines to characters. So as an adapter, that's a fun challenge, figuring out how to bring that to life in a theatrical context. We tell stories through dialogue.

**What do you hope audiences take away from the production?**

Fun. Joy. Family connection and appreciation for the things that make us human. A reminder of the better parts of the human soul and spirit.



Costume renderings by Bill Black.



LEADING *Ladies* presents

## DRACULA

By VANESSA SEVERO in collaboration with JOANIE SCHULTZ  
Directed by JOANIE SCHULTZ and VANESSA SEVERO

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre

**FEB. 3 – MARCH 3, 2024**

## DO THE BITE THING

By Tatiana Godfrey

This February, the Playhouse will be bringing audiences a world premiere adaptation of *Dracula*, written and directed by Vanessa Severo in collaboration with Joanie Schultz. Playhouse audiences will remember Severo from her play *Frida...A Self Portrait* and from her beautiful, stylized movement work in last season's *Shane*. Schultz is, of course, the Playhouse Associate Artistic Director, and audiences are sure to remember her direction of last season's world premiere of the workplace comedy *Origin Story*. Suffice it to say, both are more than familiar with how to build a new play, and they're bringing their expertise to the 2023 – 24 season.

When generating the first draft of the adaptation, Severo and Schultz offered some insights into the process and their intentions. "In this adaptation, we shift the lens, and view the story through the female gaze. Evil does exist, and can be fought with axes, spears, crucifixes, and science...or simply by women's ingenuity."

Their first draft was sent to Playhouse artistic staff at the end of April of this year. They were then able to ask for and receive feedback about the structure, character arcs and clarity. Between the first draft and the subsequent drafts, production was already beginning on the show. Schultz

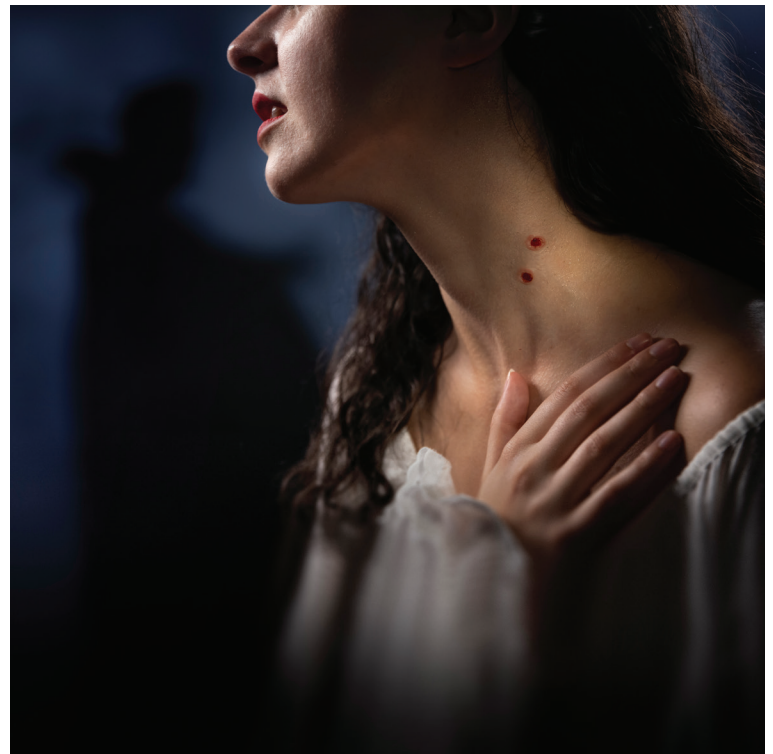


Photo by Tony Arrasmith/Arrasmith & Associates.

and Severo were able to assemble and sit down with a design team, coming up with concrete ideas of what this play would look and sound like. This preliminary design process allowed the writers to see and think about their script from a sensory perspective and helped clarify what other parts of the script wanted revising.

From the various feedback they received, Severo and Schultz produced a few subsequent drafts which eventually went into workshop in late September. This means that actors are brought into a rehearsal space to read the script aloud. Workshops help identify spots in the text that aren't yet clear, allow the playwrights to gather feedback, and allow for necessary changes to be made before rehearsals for the actual production begin.

Currently, production for *Dracula* is beginning in earnest. The cast will be finalized; sets will be built; and rehearsals begin in January. Having the expertise of Severo and Schultz guide the script, designers, actors, crew, and audience through this new play process ensures that our brand-new production of *Dracula* will deliver blood-pumping action, riveting drama, and characters that will keep you hooked until the very last drop.