

## CHS Actors Put New Blood into 'Dracula' Production

'Bloody Good' performances onstage and behind the scenes.



"I'm so bloody happy to see you all here tonight," said [Coventry High School](#) Drama Program Director Myke Wilkinson on stage Friday before his student actors performed *Dracula*, the most famous of vampire tales.

And the CHS School auditorium stage- resembling a sanitarium on the west coast of England in the late 19th century- was the setting for the dramatization Wilkinson said "was closest to the 1897 novel written by Bram Stoker."

But it was not just the simulated scenes of traditional blood and gore, stakes driven in the heart, the telltale bites to the neck, howling, screams and other rituals associated with vampires that totally engaged the audience.

Over 300 students, teachers and friends carefully listened to long scenes of dialogue between characters who nailed their parts, helping to seamlessly move along this famous tale of suspense, horror and the madness of a Transylvanian vampire.

“Sometimes good and evil are a matter of perception,” said Count Dracula (Brad Tager),” in a sign of bad things to come.

Then the Count not so subtly and humorously intoned, “Humans, I thrive on them; they’re so fresh” and “I wish you all good health; I drink to your health.”

Insane inmate Robert Renfield, energetically portrayed by Brandon Lewis with his physical antics, rantings and ravings, also offered insight into the terror wrought by Count Dracula.

Matthew Fusco, as Dr. John Seward, along with Jake Creta, playing Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, were often the centerpieces of this drama as they tried to discover what caused the mysterious ‘illness’ of Lucy Westphal (Emily Lee Gamage).

And with the clever use of special effects, including dual screens set at angles in the background with computer-driven video animation, along with lighting, sound and fog made by dry ice, the play offered a lesson in vampire education for the audience and actors.

“The play was very challenging,” agreed Tager and Gamage. “We had to work around all the technical effects and set changes.”

“Everything was so different from the last play ([the musical, \*Hair\*](#)) we did,” added Gamage, who lists Marine Biology as her career endeavor and drama as a “hobby.”

For Tager, a senior who wants to study animation at the Rhode Island School of Design, it was his first major starring role on the stage. “I never really saw any Dracula movies, but I have seen *Twilight*,” he said.

Other cast members with major parts included: Khrysta Ryan as Mina Grant; Reilly Mitchell as Margaret Sullivan; Connor Orme as Norbert Briggs; Matthew Prince as Jonathan Harker, and the Monster, as portrayed by Freddy Lopez.

The program was a collaborative effort that also relied on participants in the CHS Drama and Advanced Drama classes, but also teachers, URI Theater Dept., original music scoring by Brad DeGraide, Tim Leyden and the Field of Screams, and many others.

And with another successful season concluded- the 14th under Wilkinson- the CHS Drama program continues to add props, costumes and set materials, and is in the process of requesting lockers and storage areas for this extra equipment that the department has collected over the years.