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Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde (Review)

A creepy, well-told tale with twists and turns

By Rick Pender



Critic's Pick

Even if you know the story of *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson's classic 1886 horror story, you'll likely be surprised by the Cincinnati Playhouse's version, since it twists and turns the tale in unanticipated directions. Jeffrey Hatcher adapted the story; his scripts, from *Scotland Road* in 1993 to *Murderers* in 2007, have often grabbed Playhouse audiences, and this version of Stevenson's tale provides unexpected textures and narrative elements.

Rather than making Henry Jekyll (Anthony Marble, pictured) an honorable, well-intended man of science, Hatcher presents an educated fellow full of secrets, prejudices and ambivalences. He confesses early on that he doubts man has a soul.

Then there's the brutish villain Henry Hyde, released by Jekyll's experiments to "isolate the beast." He's so complex and expansive that the script uses four of the six actors to portray him. (Scott Schafer, Andrew Matthews, Kyle Fabel and Bernadette

Quigley play multiple roles.) The conceit suggests we each have a beast within us. You're never quite sure from which corner of the stage this predatory creature will materialize. It's a chilling device.

Sometimes Hyde is embodied simultaneously by several actors, each wearing a black cape, growling and personifying brutality, sexuality, heartlessness and cruelty. Jekyll's harsh interactions with Elizabeth Jelkes (Katie Fabel), a chambermaid drawn into Hyde's dark world, reveals the doctor's own monstrous side. Is he so distinct from Hyde? The two men are aspects of the same personality, and their story exists in their gray overlap, rather than the black and white of good and evil.

The production, directed by Ed Stern, uses a high wall of panels and a floor of transparent boxes (set design by Robert Mark Morgan) that flood with colors to emphasize the mood (Thomas C. Hase designed the lighting). The characters, often standing in angular white light surrounded by darkness, are clad in gray and black Victorian garb (Elizabeth Covey is the costumer). But blood frequently punctuates the action (there's an especially gruesome and graphic autopsy of one of Hyde's victims), and an iconic red door glows as the foreboding entrance into this creepy, well-told tale.

DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE, presented by Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, continues through May 22. Buy tickets, check out performance times and find nearby bars and restaurants [here](#).

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