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# 'Dracula Sabbat' May Leave You Cold

Saturday 15 March  
1975

By WALTER LAZENBY

CHARLESTON — Looking for "atmosphere"? You can find it — painstakingly and successfully created — at Eastern in the Playroom of the Fine Arts Theatre, where "Dracula Sabbat" will reek with it again tonight, tomorrow afternoon, and Monday night.

There in the midst of gigantic swaying cobwebs, under eerie lights, ghoulish apparitions—carrying candles, crawling, dancing, chanting—will insinuate themselves into your consciousness as they writhe their way through the rite of the Witches' Sabbath. Further, they will conjure up a troupe of actors to go through a pageant-like enactment of Count

Dracula's story, with its vampirism and various other sensational details.

What you will see may have been intended to chill your spine, but it may only succeed in leaving you cold.

Now I realize that I am dully "rational" and sometimes too literal-minded; I put no stock in superstition, don't read astrological predictions, and can't get interested in the supernaturalism currently popular in some quarters. So what I have to say will represent a highly personal, idiosyncratic response to the production, a fact that will be readily apparent to director, cast, and crew, as well as to regular readers of these reviews.

I feel compelled to say that atmosphere is about all the script has to recommend it.

The narrator's frame-comments sound like a hodgepodge of instructions for a meditation session and advice from a pop psychologist. The not-too-coherent narration is too pretentious ("choose your future self with care!"), the Dracula story too episodic, moving as it does from one cheap thrill to another. The moment of highest excitement for me came when I realized that an actor's sleeve or cape was too near a candle and likely to catch fire.

And surely a script chosen for performance as reader's theatre ought to have some beauty of language? The witches occasionally speak gibberish, sometimes repeating "Gnar-r-r-" and "Yah!" ad nauseam while breathing heavily. One offstage voice, even though

amplified, was unintelligible Thursday night. And some of the actors, in an attempt to convey the deathly aura of such a spooky scene, merely became soporific, lacking vocal energy.

I noted these exceptions: Eddie Eldred and Joan Allen achieved some moments of believable intensity and Curt Powell created the most convincing character, a doctor with a German accent.

I'm sorry to have to express such unusual disappointment (I usually try to like what I see in the amateur theatre), but I came away feeling regret that much time and energy had been spent on ... yes, according to this handy dictionary, "claptrap" is the word I mean. The only consolation was that the material served as a demanding acting exercise.