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ENTERTAINMENT

'Jekyll & Hyde' puts new face on musicals

Friday, October 1, 2004

By **CHUCK DARROW**
 Courier-Post Staff

Despite prevailing wisdom and history, casino Broadway presentations don't have to be light-'n'-fluffy affairs that have audiences whistling a happy tune as they head back to the slot machines. Proof of that can be found at Trump Plaza, which, through Oct. 31, is presenting Jekyll & Hyde.

The Frank Wildhorn-Leslie Bricuse musical is based on The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the classic 19th century novella by Robert Louis Stevenson. Like the original story, the musical is a dark, sophisticated meditation on the struggle between good and evil - an eternal battle, according to Stevenson, that rages in the souls of all human beings. That is why those seeking jokey banter and toe-tapping tunes needn't bother with the show.

On the other hand, if top-shelf staging, stellar ensemble performances and a dynamic and compelling lead turn are more your speed, then don't miss Jekyll & Hyde.

The Actors Equity production rests on the fulcrum of Rob Richardson's work. He stars as both the upright (and somewhat uptight) Dr. Henry Jekyll and Jekyll's drug-induced alter-ego, Edward Hyde, whose forays into the world of Victorian decadence and moral turpitude ignite the story's philosophical and physical conflicts.

Richardson displays great constraint as the thoroughly despicable Hyde, choosing nuance over the kind of cartoon-like caricature upon which less-talented actors might depend. Such a mannered performance makes the character that much more real, which makes him more frightening.

Richardson's powerful, dramatic voice completes what is arguably one of the best theatrical performances an Atlantic City casino showroom has ever seen.

However, you'd be mistaken to assume Jekyll & Hyde is merely the "Rob Richardson Show." The rest of the cast is just as pitch perfect.

Holly Holcomb as Lucy, the prostitute whose attraction to both men proves tragic, plays the role with appropriate amounts of both brio and vulnerability; soprano Erin Davie provides the right contrast to Holcomb's Lucy as Jekyll's innocent fiance, Emma.

Aubrey Jones likewise impresses as Jekyll's friend and lawyer, John Utterson, and Brian Kuchta makes a strong impression in the smaller role of Spider, a particularly malevolent pimp.

The leads and chorus members alike well serve the score, which lives in the same melodic neighborhood as Les Miserables and Phantom of the Opera. Among the many highlights are the Richardson-Davie duet, "Take Me as I Am," Holcomb's saucy "Bring on the Men" and the ensemble pieces "Facade" and "Murder, Murder."

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The satisfying, if not immediately accessible, score and superior acting and singing are equaled by Elizabeth Lucas' sharp direction and the stage design by David Esler. It all adds up to a superior 90 minutes of grown-up entertainment.

Show times are 8 p.m. Friday, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday and 2 p.m. Tuesday. Admission is \$25. For tickets and information, call (800) 759-8786 or go to www.trumpplaza.com. `Lamb'-less at Borgata

The Lamb won't be lying down at Borgata Saturday and Sunday, as the Genesis impersonators extraordinaire who make up The Musical Box have postponed their visit to the bayside pleasure dome.

The Montreal-based group, which last fall sold out two shows at the Big B, was scheduled to bring to the casino its re-creation of Genesis' 1974 *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* presentation. The group's Web site (www.themusicalbox.net) cites unspecified "unforeseen circumstances" as the reason for the cancellation, but those in the know suggest a sluggish box office is the culprit.

For refund information, call (609) 317-1000.

Casinos appears on Friday. Reach Atlantic City casinos writer Chuck Darrow at (856) 486-2442 or cdarrow@camden.gannett.com.

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