

Behind
the
curtain
with

PLAYMAKERS

It's about all
the people who
magically transform a
starkly empty stage into a
wonderfully
performed and
produced play.

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Rick Billings...

Appearing on stage, but not in the mirror

As *Dracula*, audiences will get to see **Rick Billings** at work in a part he can really sink his teeth into when *Dracula* arrives at the Playhouse on September 26. Rick has previously acted in a number of plays for the Wimberley Players. Most recently, he was Colonel Thomas McKean in *1776*, Vince in *Divorce Southern Style* and Clown, Jake the Fence and Ali Baba in *Christmas Carol*. Rick is a local actor who skipped college and went right to work after school. He has lived in Wimberley for 12 years and his offstage life is that of a massage therapist.

Vampires have lived long and peopled our imaginations ever since Bram Stoker published his novel *Dracula* in 1897. Portrayals have varied from Max Schrek's hideous and bat-like Count Orlok in the German film *Nosferatu* of 1922 to Bela Lugosi's more urbane, but no less menacing, Count Dracula of the 1931 film. Lugosi is still the definitive vampire for many of us. The bat wings have beaten on through interpretations by a far-too-handsome-for-fiendishness Louis Jordan in a 1977 television version, and by Gary Oldman in Francis Ford Coppola's seventieth anniversary *Dracula* of 1992.

The Playmaker asked Rick if all these previous depictions have had much influence on the way he is approaching the role. "I've seen other versions, but I don't want to emulate them. I want to bring my own creativity and inspiration to the working out of my



interpretation of the role. What I'm striving toward is a rendering that is fresh, but slightly familiar," he told us. Unlike the animal-like creature of *Nosferatu*, Rick said he wants to bring to the character a sense of self awareness that is tinged with a feeling of loathsomeness for the thing he has become.

Rehearsals for *Dracula* began at Director **Lee Coleé-Atnip's** home on

July 21 and have continued in the theatre lobby. Every once in while, now that most of the sawdust is gone, the actors try to sneak on stage to get the feel of the space. Because the set building crew is such a nice bunch, **Charlotte Caldwell** told us they occasionally even vacuum up the sawdust for them. "We are still developing, pulling the show together and working for the right atmosphere," Rick said.

Dracula is equal parts Gothic horror and Greek tragedy. University of Texas faculty member Steven Dietz has created a play that is as breathtaking as a thrill ride. Every retelling of the mysteries of the world of Count Dracula has as its theme the struggle between good and evil. Rick and the cast of *Dracula*, with the help of some extra-special special effects, have crafted an evening that will be filled with memorable chills. For this one, you might do well to consider bringing along your cross and a hawthorn stake. Oh, and if you notice anyone without a shadow or a reflection in the mirror skulking about, just cross the street!



Rick as Jake the Fence in
Christmas Carol

Turning an empty stage into something special... When the curtain opens, jaws will drop

Team at work... This year's addition of a grand drape at the Wimberley Playhouse has brought added anticipation as each audience awaits its first look at the stage. In this issue, *Playmakers* visits with the many talented people who, working behind the scenes, are responsible for the design, building and decorating of the first visible "character" of each play, the set.

Organized chaos... Things seemed pretty chaotic to this visitor to the theatre in the weeks before the opening of a new show. Saws were whining in the workshop and nail guns popping as volunteer carpenters **Michael Iles** and **Michael Caldwell** put together the beginnings of the set for *Dracula*. An uninitiated observer had to marvel that the complex construction job could be done in time for the September opening.

Ah, but one learns the method behind this madness when chatting with the show's set designer, **Charlotte Caldwell**. She told us the first step is research into how the play has been staged elsewhere; the next step is the making of a detailed blueprint and graphics to help plan use of stage space to accommodate the play's several scenes. "We found the set created for the Trinity University production was the one that could best be adapted to the space we have," Charlotte said.

Building, painting and more... Once the plan was in place, volunteers got to work on the hammers and nails of building the set. In addition to Iles and Caldwell, four other volunteers helped with construction of the *Dracula* set: **Don Stephenson**, **Tom McComb**, **Michael Stewart** and **Bob Caldwell**, with extra added help from **Joan Miller**, her husband and a friend of Caldwell's who came all the way from Dallas. With set building completed, the next step was painting the set. This job was in the hands of construction painting crew members **Nancy Weaver**, **Karen Nielsen** and **Denice Calley**, with help from set designer Charlotte Caldwell. In addition to straight painting, Calley, professional faux artist of Faux-bulous, taught Caldwell her old-stone faux

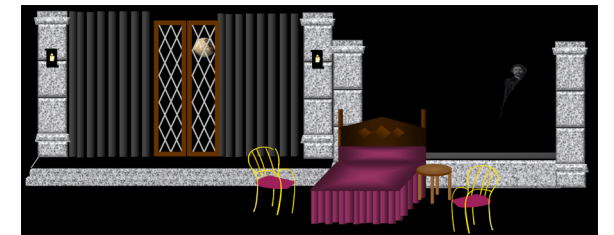
painting technique and together they stoned the columns.

Important details... Every show has a budget, and staying within it also requires research. Sumptuous fabrics for pillows, curtains, and bedspreads were found online, available at a suitable price. The fabrics were turned over to Prop Seamstresses **Joan Goetz**, **Julia Moulnet**, **Sharon Drubeck** and **Vicki Virmelson**. Even at an early stage in the process, two finished pillows indicated the lavish look of this production.

Staging *Dracula* required some special props created by **Gregory Dunham**, **Stephen Robinson**, **Scott Wade**, and **Denise Bjerke** ... as well as one jaunty skeleton that just wandered in. Some nine-hour days were needed to complete these jobs.

Teamwork... It takes a team to stage a play, and Playhouse audiences are fortunate to have had these talented and dedicated people at work on *Dracula*. Be sure to give them all a "Bravissimo" when the curtain opens. *And* if you're handy with a hammer,

It starts here...



Then the teamwork begins...



You can see the spectacular results of this team effort weekends from September 26-October 19.