

Stage: 'Vampire Lesbians of Sodom'

By D.J.R. BRUCKNER

Beautiful Beasts

VAMPIRE LESBIANS OF SODOM and SLEEPING BEAUTY or COMA, by Charles Busch; directed by Kenneth Elliott; choreography by Jeff Veazey; scenic design by B.T. Whitehill; costumes by John Glaser, wigs by Elizabeth Katherine Carr, lighting by Vivien Leone; production stage manager, Elizabeth Katherine Carr. Presented by Theater-in-Limbo and Gerald A. Davis. At The Provincetown Playhouse, 133 Macdougall Street.

VAMPIRE LESBIANS OF SODOM

Ali and P.J. Robert Carey
Hujar and Zack..... Arnie Kolodner
A Virgin Sacrifice and
Madeleine Astarte..... Charles Busch
The Succubus and
La Condessa..... Meghan Robinson
King Carlisle Kenneth Elliott
Etienne and Danny Andy Halliday
Renee Vain and Tracy..... Theresa Marlowe
Oatsie Carew Tom Aulino

SLEEPING BEAUTY or COMA

Miss Thicke Andy Halliday
Enid Wetwhistle..... Meghan Robinson
Sebastian Lore Kenneth Elliott
Fauna Alexander Charles Busch
Ian McKenzie..... Tom Aulino
Anthea Arlo Theresa Marlowe
Barry Posner Robert Carey
Craig Prince Arnie Kolodner

In Charles Busch's "Vampire Lesbians of Sodom" and the accompanying "Sleeping Beauty or Coma" the legitimate stage, if that's what it can be called in this case, may have found the answer to "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." One can imagine a cult forming. Costumes flashier than pinball machines, outrageous lines, awful puns, sinister innocence, harmless depravity – it's all here. And it is contagious; this kind of campy show that transforms everything it touches attracts audiences that could take over and finish the performance if the cast walked out in the middle.

Not much escapes the demolition by laughter. What can you expect from a troupe that refers to Sodom and Gomorrah as "the twin cities?" Without assaulting any of them directly, this company certainly gives one irreverent idea about Dracula, old movies, Las Vegas revues, sex, fairy tales, high fashion, manhood, the 70's, the women's movement, health foods, the Beatles, narcotics and a great deal more in two very quick hours. The Provincetown Playhouse, with its 15-foot-deep stage yawning behind a 9-by-18-foot proscenium is a perfect space for their antics. (Incidentally, look closely at the proscenium arch. It adds to the total weirdness and is a good sign of the meticulous care the Theater-in-Limbo, which is presenting these pieces, gives to its work.)

“Impersonator” is too feeble a word for Mr. Busch; the female roles he creates are hilarious vamps, but also high comic characters. His “Virgin Sacrifice” (it’s a role, not a skit) in the first scene of “Vampires” and his rising Hollywood star later in the same piece are grotesque triumphs and his Fauna Alexander in “Beauty” may be uncomely but she won’t be forgotten. But he has written equally wild roles for Meghan Robinson, who plays opposite him in both pieces, and she is entirely up to them. For someone whose training was in classical theater and who is in the daytime television soaps nowadays this transformation into a comedian is wonderful; she is a very funny woman. If she ever walked into her soap opera in the La Condesa role she plays in “Vampires” the whole world of afternoon sentiment would simply explode with laughter.

The whole cast plays together like a well-trained ensemble, which speaks well not only for the players, but for Mr. Busch, Kenneth Elliott the director and Jeff Veazey the choreographer. Mr. Elliott is also in the cast; his Sebastian Lore, a fashion designer, is what sleaze would be if it became a person. Among the others, Tom Aulino is great fun as a Louella Parsonsish columnist who reveals she is really a disguised male vampire-hunter backed up by the Los Angeles Fire Department “which is even now dousing your mansion with holy water.” Andy Halliday’s hands and mouth are silent instruments of wit, whether he is playing male or female roles; he can turn his face into a dozen masks in a few minutes and his fingers leave one with the impression he’s always fluttered over by birds. Little Theresa Marlowe plays captivating ingénues in a way that remind one of the young Bernadette Peters, and she has a shriek that could turn a parrot green with envy.

But John Glaser the costume designer may have the most satisfying job in this production. “Sleeping Beauty,” which takes place in the mod fashion world of London in the 60’s, gives him a chance to drape everyone in metal, plastic, rubber, patchwork, and silk and satin of awesomely garish colors and repulsive shapes. And “Vampire Lesbians of Sodom,” which is mostly about Hollywood in the 20’s and a bit about Las Vegas now, lets him create two movie queens with clothes more exotic than those in a Tom Tierney paper doll book.

It might be objected that the titles of these pieces have little enough to do with the action, but it would also be hard to prove precisely what the action is. Mr. Busch’s is not that kind of theater. Of its kind it is very good. It accomplishes exactly what he wants it to – the audience laughs at the first line and goes right on laughing at every line to the end, and even at some of the silences. That’s no mean achievement.