

t h e a t e r

# Drakula's son is gay

Writer-performer David Drake—né Drakula—talks about tracing his family history to Transylvania and turning his search into a new one-person show **By Gerard Raymond**

“I have never impaled anyone—with a stick,” says David Drake with a reassuring smile. That will be a relief for audiences at his latest solo performance work, *Son of Drakula*, running from October 10 to November 2 at San Francisco’s New Conservatory Theatre Center. The show chronicles Drake’s attempts to trace his ancestry all the way back to Vlad Dracula, a.k.a. “the Impaler,” who was notorious for driving wooden stakes through his enemies. You see, although we know the writer-performer of *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* as “Drake,” his real surname is Drakula.

“I am Drakula,” Drake intones at the start of his show, echoing the words of

the famous Bram Stoker novel that forever linked Eastern European vampire lore to the 15th-century Transylvanian. “It’s an adventure story, like the novel,” he says. “We go into the unknown world in Transylvania.”

In the 11 years since the debut of *Larry Kramer*, Drake has directed work by others and appeared in various stage and screen productions, including the New York revival of *The Boys in the Band*. About eight years ago he became interested in tracing the origins of his family name. (His mother changed his name to Drake after she divorced his father, but legally he remains a Drakula.)

“It turns out that my great-grandfather who emigrated [from Europe] is

one of only 11 Drakulas to ever come here,” Drake says. As he delved further back, Drake’s genealogical quest inevitably led him to Vlad’s stomping grounds in modern Romania and Hungary—and to Croatia, the current home of his branch of the Drakulas.

“I can trace my family authoritatively to the year 1611 to a place in Serbia, very close to Kosovo. They are ethnic Serbs who lived in Croatia,” Drake says. Hoping to clinch the genealogical link to the Impaler, he ended up presenting a paper on his research at the World Dracula Congress in Transylvania.

Drake immediately sensed the project’s dramatic potential. “It was an archetypal identity quest,” he says. “I would tell stories about the people I met and started doing their voices.”

In the show Drake vividly impersonates a colorful gallery of characters, but *Son of Drakula*’s most telling and moving moments occur when he recreates interviews with his father, Dave Drakula, who died last year. “It was a way to get closer to him,” says the performer, who takes on the roles of both father and son. Drake’s mother, who died in a car accident in 1980 when he was 17, had gotten divorced some 10 years before. Since the divorce, his father, a hunter who wrote a syndicated sports column on the outdoors, had been estranged from the family. When David came out at age 16, however, his father was incensed. “He blamed my mother, and he thought it was the theater that was doing it to me. Ha! Ha!” Drake recalls.

Eventually father and son established a kind of détente. “We were very friendly—he was charming and was interested in people,” Drake says. They also found a way to bridge their differences “through literature,” Drake continues. “He started to read David Leavitt in the mid ’80s, and he began to understand gay issues that way.”

Still, in 2001 Drakula published a memoir of his hunting exploits that made no mention of his first wife or his only son. “It was very difficult to be edited out of my father’s life emotionally,” says Drake. “And now that he is dead, I have edited him back in for my record.” ■

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