

T&G Chills with eerie “The Uninvited”

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The secret is out: Town and Gown's current production, "The Uninvited," is a success. Despite a somewhat predictable plot, the outstanding ensemble cast pulled together Thursday night to bring audience members a surprisingly humorous evening with eerie undertones throughout the play.

In first time director Kevin Worley's Director's Notes he mentions that the play is immersed in clichés, but it still works. "You'll find much in our times that is cliché about 'The Uninvited,'" he writes. "Many elements of the story have been used so many times for so many years that they have virtually become a part of our culture.

"Cliff End, the secluded English country house in this play, sits on the edge of the moors on the coast of the Irish Sea. Because of this setting, the pounding of the waves, and the moans of the winds over the moors, you pretty well know right away that the house is haunted. It has to be because it's cliché.



The characters in Town and Gown's "The Uninvited" are surprised when their seance actually conjures up a real ghost (Amy Hartwig, in the background). Seated are, clockwise from left, Dr. Scott (Jack Hodgson), Pamela Fitzgerald (Nicole Powers), Max Hilliard (Kyle Shifflett), Wendy Carey (Charissa Lee) and Roderick Fitzgerald (Mike Melancon). Photo by Moira K. Wiley

"But let's face it, a house in this kind of setting is just pretty darn creepy to begin with, cliché or not ... it works in 'The

Uninvited.' We've had a lot of fun working with this tale, its cliches and its creepy little surprises."

Creepy surprises is right. Even though audience members expect something a bit scary to happen at some point during the play, they still couldn't stop themselves from sucking in a little breath when they saw an eerie light shining from beneath the nursery door, heard a woman weeping and heard the sad sound of a music box playing. The creepy factor rose more because the lights had all been turned down in the theater, save the eerie bluish light coming from beneath the door, and then one of the characters sneaked in and unflinchingly walked into the nursery saying, "Don't cry mother, I'm here."

Before the play ends, many things are revealed by the various characters, a seance and the "Uninvited," a ghost who haunts the house at Cliff End, but whose ghost is it? And does it mean to do harm or good?

Worley said he was "more nervous tonight (the opening night) than when he was on stage performing," but he was pleased with the play's outcome and reception by attendees. "First of all the set was tremendous," he said. "And the actors really came together and performed very well as a group."

Although the play technically did not have a star and everyone in the cast put in a fine performance, two performers seemed to stick out more than others. Charissa Lee plays Wendy Carey, an actress/psychic who's a bit kooky and lot entertaining. Lee's portrayal at some points brought chills to the audience and at others snickers and outright laughter as her character tried her best to encounter a real ghost.

The show stealer of the bunch, however, was undoubtedly Joyce Cox playing Irish maid Lizzie Flynn. Cox brought the superstitious character with a cat named Whiskey to life and, most especially, brought many rounds of robust laughter from the crowd. All in all, she brought a surprising amount of humor to the play to successfully offset the eeriness.

Rounding out the cast with spectacular performances of their own were Liz Tabish as Stella Meredith, Nicole Powers as Pamela Fitzgerald, Mike Melancon as Roddy Fitzgerald, Jim Gray as Commander Brooke, Angie Ellis as Mrs. Jessup, Kyle Shifflett as Max Hilliard, Jack Hodson as Dr. Scott and Leah Clougherty as Miss Holloway. And don't forget the Uninvited, played with just the right amount of spooky by Amy Hartwig.

The cast's performance, however, wasn't the only thing attendees had to talk about at the end of the show. The special effects that Worley insisted be kept secret from the time rehearsals began were revealed to the delight of audience members. These effects added to the spookiness already prevalent throughout the production, with the only possible hitch coming during a rather smoky

scene.

And even though the classic Irish ghost story may have been riddled with cliches, audience members still seemed impressed; expressing their enjoyment to cast members immediately following their final bow. "Although there are things we wanted to do that just wouldn't work, we made up for it everywhere else," Worley said.

Made up indeed. The play has another week of performances, so theatergoers still have time to go see what all the fuss is about, but be prepared to laugh and get a few chills down your back.

"The Uninvited" will run Thursday through Sunday with performances at 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and at 2:30 p.m. Sunday. Tickets sell for \$9 for adults with discounted student tickets available for \$6. Senior citizen tickets are also available for the Sunday matinee for \$7 each. Tickets can be reserved by calling 372-9122 or bought at the box office. For more information visit Town and Gown's website at www.townandgown.org