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TOP STORY

SUNY Oswego student producer readies 'Dracula' for theater

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Producer and designer Nova Grayson Casillo, left, a SUNY Oswego senior theater major, adjusts the Victorian-era costume of professional actor Stephanie Ward (Lucy) as student actor Noelle Gotimer (Mina) looks on. Casillo's thesis project for SUNY Oswego's Honors Program, Steven Dietz' adaptation of "Dracula" opens at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 15 in Tyler Hall's lab theater.

Submitted photo

OSWEGO — SUNY Oswego theater major Nova Grayson Casillo chose an ambitious senior honors thesis, a project with some serious bite: Producing and designing the Steven Dietz adaptation of "Dracula."

Opening at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 15, and running at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 16, and 2 p.m. Dec. 17, all performances are in Tyler Hall's lab theater, where Casillo says he plans to deliver an immersive experience for fans of the seductive thriller.

Why take on months of work many moving parts — even for a thesis for the college's Honors Program — to produce ticketed performances of a full-length play?



"I said, 'Why not?' I have the resources while I'm here at Oswego, so I thought why not see if I can do it?" said Casillo, whose focus is design and technical theater.

Casillo formed his own company, Cravat Productions, and set to work. He hired a friend who freelances in the theater business, Chicago-based Rebekah Reimer — they had met while working at the Sterling Renaissance Festival — as his stage and technical director, and recruited a cast of professional and student actors.

The company opened rehearsals Nov. 12 for its first production, Dietz' 1996 stage adaptation of the Bram Stoker novel "Dracula," presented in conjunction with Dramatists Play Service and with the mentorship of SUNY Oswego theater staff members Cole Sostak and Sean Culligan.

The two-act play closely follows the ever-popular Victorian tale, which has been called "rich with humor and horror" and "painting a wickedly theatrical picture of Stoker's famous vampire."

Magical elements

The biggest challenge for the student producer, as with most theatrical productions, has been raising money, Casillo said.

A contribution from the college's Blackfriars student theater organization, an Indiegogo campaign, sales of a Cravat Productions tote bag and a few scholarships he obtained have been helpful, he said. The fundraising effort goes on, right through ticket sales, as budget issues present themselves.

SUNY Oswego student Pablo Mendoza plays the infamous Count Dracula. Other students in the cast are Khari Constantine (Dr. Seward), Ryan Pacheco (Harker), Noelle Gotimer (Mina) and Lillian DePerno and Michaela Buckley in the ensemble.

Casillo also recruited professional actors Chuck Teska as Renfield, Michael Gilbert (Van Helsing), Stephanie Ward (Lucy) and Stephanie Johnson as lead ensemble.

Casillo's effort "certainly is ambitious," said Culligan, technical director and production manager at Waterman Theater.

"He's brought in an outside director and actors and technical people. He's shown a foresight that has been critical to this production," said Culligan.



The student producer said he has positioned "Dracula" in an epoch he loves.

"We are setting it in the Victorian era and adding elements of magic to that world," Casillo said.

The Niagara Falls resident said his passion in theater is props. "Dracula," naturally, presents some opportunities for a props master dealing with special effects.

The remainder of the crew, all SUNY Oswego students, includes Nicole Caroselli as stage manager/sound board operator; Nick Baiamonte, assistant stage manager; Mary Reid, light board operator; Alesha Frasier, costume supervisor; Sydney Lattenhauer and Leah Iannone (hair, makeup and costume crew); and Ryan Benson Smith, house manager.

Tickets are discounted for students and are available at all SUNY Oswego box offices, online at tickets.oswego.edu or by calling 315-312-2141.

For more information on the staging of "Dracula," visit Cravat Productions' website at cravatproductions.org.



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