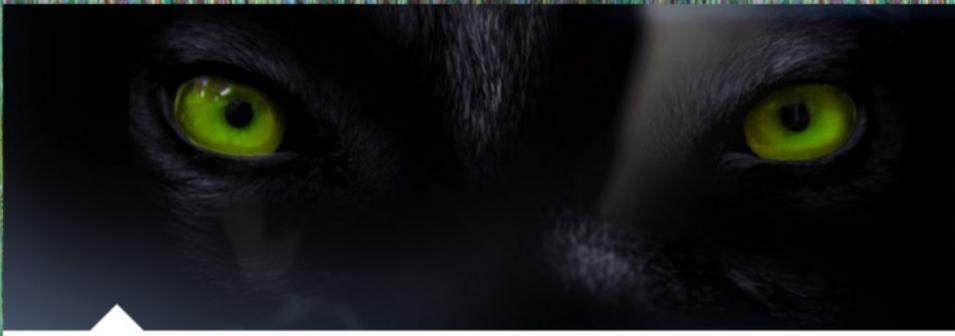




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Rain or Shine Theatre Company: The Hound of the Baskervilles.

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Last night I had the immense pleasure of watching a performance of Arthur Conan – Doyle’s crime fiction masterpiece, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Performed by only four members of the Rain or Shine Theatre company, the actors – under the direction of Tom Jordan – dive into an oft performed text, and yet manage to come up with an entirely new and clever interpretation.

Starring Matt Ferriman as Sir Henry Baskerville/Mr Jack Stapleton, Rob Keeves as Mr Sherlock Holmes/Mr John Barrymore, Anthony Young as Dr John Watson and Pippa Meekings as Dr James Mortimer/Miss Beryl Stapleton/Mrs Eliza Barrymore, the production chose the traditional Victorian era as its setting. Before the play began and as guests filtered into the rapidly filling hall, Sherlock sat on stage in his chair, fingertips pressed together, deep in his deductions. Watson, on the other hand, sat much more comfortably, occasionally puffing on his pipe and turning the pages of his newspaper. This set the scene extremely well, as the audience was able to take a good look at the incredibly detailed stage and the carefully arranged costumes of the actors. Even though the two actors were merely sitting, one could see the attention to detail within the play. Keeves, though still, perfectly maintained the haughty expression we often see on the face of our favourite detective, whilst Young’s Watson would occasionally stand and potter about the room, before returning to his chair with a quick upward hitch of his trousers before he resumed his seat. In contrast to Holmes, he came across exactly as John Watson should, approachable, gentle, and well-balanced in his disposition.

Although small, the company made ingenious use of the stage. Transitions from 221B Baker Street to the train to Devonshire were made smoothly via the use of functioning doors and windows in the set, through which the actors could pop their heads for comedic effect. The train scene was also a personal highlight for me; the sound effects alongside the gentle back-and-forth rocking of the actors in time with the movement of the train was another great example of just how much care and attention was poured into this play.

The second act of the play became more self – aware; actors often recognized they were in the wrong character, and switched roles at the drop of a hat, quite literally. A particular highlight in this scene was Matt Ferriman, who brilliantly switched between playing Baskerville and Stapleton, complete with changing accents. One moment the dynamic Henry, sporting an American accent which brought to mind images of the young man strolling the streets of the melting pot to take whisky and cigars with his acquaintances, the next the uptight and poised Englishman Stapleton, who constantly showed too much teeth to be considered trustworthy. In one particular scene, Ferriman made these transitions by diving between the hats of his two characters, which were held aloft by Keeves and Young.

Meekings was also excellent, particularly in the role of Miss Stapleton, and would cringe away from the touch of her overbearing brother, twisting herself into all sorts of contortions to avoid him. The campy eccentricity of the hysterical Miss Stapleton was played to perfection by her, particularly when her character crossed over with that of Detective Inspector Lestrade by way of a forgotten moustache. Her appearances as Dr Mortimer were also brilliantly played, down to the gentle tremble in her hands and the habitual tucking in of her necktie into her waistcoat.

As well as fourth wall breaks – and an amusing reference to the Royal National Theatre uttered by Ferriman as he scuttled down the centre aisle amongst the audience – much of the plays humour centred around the appearance of the eponymous hound. {Spoiler}

{Spoiler}

Overall, the fresh, humorous take on the classic text provided an entertaining two hours and a thoroughly enjoyable evening out.

Rachel Clements - 04/01/2017