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## REVIEW: "The Gravedigger, A Frankenstein Story"

Williamston Theatre

after he has fled and before he and the doctor have their final confrontation.

An unlikely friendship develops between the broken gravedigger, played by Mark Colson, and the creature who takes on the name Anton, played by Alex Leydenfrost.

Zettelmaier's play is an exploration of what makes a person human. If we are more than the collection of our parts, when does our soul develop? How do we learn to overcome our impulses and to become more than a collection of emotions and reactions?

Colson's Kurt, the gravedigger, limps onto the scene with wry humor and a pain that goes beyond his aching leg. He is a loner whose good heart shines through. He talks about the pain of the world and how it can only be endured, never avoided, yet he himself brings comfort and aid to others. He reaches out to Anton and patiently endures what other men might flee from.

In a cast of solid, strong actors, Colson shines with a strength that comes from his character's brokenness. He never loses the limp, and his actions are always consistent with that of a man who has a crushed leg. He also portrays the brokenness of spirit, a man who has lost all but still hasn't given up hope that people can be helped.

Leydenfrost captures the creature with a combination of slow speech and ponderous movements. He is an intelligent monster, one who is growing into life and starting to understand the world around him. Leydenfrost finds the perfect note that avoids the stereotype of the monster and creates a person that others can relate to. He is child-like and powerful at the same time. He is also, as the character says about himself early on, "damaged" – and Leydenfrost speaks and moves like a man who is damaged on the inside and despairing of redemption.

Joe Seibert is the young doctor who is on a mission to undo his mistakes and eliminate the monster he created. Victor, too, is a broken man, a man who is crazed from watching all those he loved be destroyed by what was supposed to be his greatest triumph. He is obsessed with revenge and blind to anything that might temper it. Seibert brings this single-mindedness to the role, finding both the doctor's strengths and weaknesses. He forces the questions: Who is the monster, and who is the man? Can too much sorrow cause a person to lose his soul?

Rounding out the cast is Alysia Kolascz, a gypsy named Nadya who raids the cemetery for bones and grave dirt so she can tell the future to her clients. Like Kurt, Nadya has lost much and yet still is able to see the good in Anton and recognize his growing soul. Kolascz brings a contrasting energy to the stage. She moves lightly despite her sorrow and smiles with a real lightness. If Kurt represents justice, Nadya is love, a love that is young, pure and simple, but no less deep for its brightness.

It is the relationships between these characters that bring strength to the play, for each of them draws something from the other. They learn from each other – in positive and negative ways – and the actors are able to bring a vulnerability to each of their characters that open the path for the relationships to bloom.

Central to this is the relationship between Kurt and Anton. Both men emerged changed from their encounter with the other, changed in life-altering ways. Anton finds a humanity that makes him more than a monster, while Kurt finds hope for redemption.

Lepard and his team of designers put laser-like focus on these relationships. Kirk Domer's set is representational, a series of wooden ramps and platforms, built up to allow the misty grave to dominate the upstage area, while a table and chairs create the downstage gravedigger's hut. Daniel C. Walker's lighting brings out the forest in the painted stage backdrop. Michelle Raymond finds music to create dramatic transitions between scenes, along with the sounds of the cemetery that so entrance Anton and guide him to feeling the presence of God.

Karen Kangas-Preston provides period costumes, including a series of changes for Anton. The makeup is uncredited, but someone did an excellent job of capturing the grotesque that is hidden for most of the play under a series of bandages.

Lepard approaches this script with great care, finding the humanity and emotions in it. He balances the violence with peaceful moments, the heaviness with humor, and the despair with hope. Each are given their time on stage with a commitment to telling the story that Zettelmaier has mined from Mary Shelley's novel.

In the end, the play is one of hope and redemption. It is one that shows the value of friendship, of trust, and of the belief that people can change, even those people who have nothing left to lose.

### SHOW DETAILS: 'The Gravedigger, A Frankenstein Story'

Williamston Theatre  
 122 S. Putnam Road, Williamston  
 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 9, 16, 23, 30  
 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10, 17, 24, 31  
 3 p.m. & 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4, 11, 18, 25, Nov. 1  
 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5, 12, 19, 26, Nov. 2  
 1 hour, 55 minutes

## Frankenstein story finds hope amid despair

By Bridgette M. Redman



Posted: Oct. 4, 2014 at 7:11 p.m.

Mary Shelley has captured the imagination of artists everywhere since publishing her novel "Frankenstein" in 1818.

The novel has spawned books, plays, cartoons, movies, other novels, costumes and art work. These works have spawned genres from horror to comedy to drama to musicals.

Williamston Theatre opens its ninth season with a world premiere of the latest of these offerings, a new play by Joseph Zettelmaier dubbed "The Gravedigger, A Frankenstein Story," directed by John Lepard.

The play takes place in a cemetery outside Ingolstadt, Bavaria in the late 1700s. It is, we learn, where the parts that make up the creature come from. Victor Frankenstein has hired a gravedigger to dig up the needed parts for him. Much later, the monster, on the run from Victor, shows up at the cemetery, drawn there for reasons he doesn't understand. He enters an open grave and plans to die there. In Mary Shelley's novel, Zettelmaier's play would be set in chapter 23, in that period

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Performance Information

Show times

- Thursday, September 25, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Friday, September 26, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Saturday, September 27, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Sunday, September 28, 2014 at 2:00 pm
- Thursday, October 2, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Friday, October 3, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Saturday, October 4, 2014 at 3:00 pm
- Saturday, October 4, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Sunday, October 5, 2014 at 2:00 pm
- Thursday, October 9, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Friday, October 10, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Saturday, October 11, 2014 at 3:00 pm
- Saturday, October 11, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Sunday, October 12, 2014 at 2:00 pm
- Thursday, October 16, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Friday, October 17, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Saturday, October 18, 2014 at 3:00 pm
- Saturday, October 18, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Sunday, October 19, 2014 at 2:00 pm
- Thursday, October 23, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Friday, October 24, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Saturday, October 25, 2014 at 3:00 pm
- Saturday, October 25, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Sunday, October 26, 2014 at 2:00 pm
- Thursday, October 30, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Friday, October 31, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Saturday, November 1, 2014 at 3:00 pm
- Saturday, November 1, 2014 at 8:00 pm
- Sunday, November 2, 2014 at 2:00 pm

**DEFAULT**