

REVIEW

'She Kills Monsters' is a must-see

BY ELIZABETH SHEPHERD
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No properly hard-boiled theater critic should ever admit, straight out of the gate of a review, that a production left her so wrecked that she staggered to her feet at the curtain call, grabbing her sleeve to mop away big, fat, streaming tears of gratitude.

And it gets worse. I was still sobbing as I walked to my car after the show, cry-eating the last of my weird intermission concession of a small, plastic container of green Jello — but more on that gelatinous mess later.

Still, this confession is the crux of it all — because theater is supposed to hit us in the heart and bring us to our knees, and that's what Drama Dock's latest production, "She Kills Monsters," did to me. I'm betting the play will do the same to other islanders at its remaining performances this Thursday through Sunday.

Directed with enormous skill by Chris Boscia, "She Kills Monsters" features a cast of 16 truly fierce actors, all younger than 30, who grab onto the meat of the show and don't ever let go, delivering indelible performances.

Played out on a bare stage but filled with fight choreography and elaborate puppetry, the show isn't easy to perform. It requires acrobatic agility as well as the chops to deliver both high comedy and wrenchingly emotional character transitions. Under Boscia's able leadership, the cast delivers all this and more.

So do the show's puppet creators, Adam Ende, Martha Enson, Cyra Jane and Kate Tobie (who is also the show's puppet and movement director). Designer Chris Overstreet has created a wall of sound and music that brings audience members into a different world from the moment they enter the smartly-reconfigured Grand Hall of Open Space, where the show is performed. And Tara Issel's costumes complete the fantasy dreamland, populated by elves, demons and queens.

"She Kills Monsters," by Asian-American playwright Qui Nguyen, tells the story of a young woman who, after the tragic death of her teenage sister, embraces her inner warrior to work through her grief within the mirrored halls of the role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons.

You don't need to understand the game to



Lucy Rogers in "She Kills Monsters," now playing at Open Space for Arts & Community.

LISA WORK PHOTO

enjoy "She Kills Monsters," with its "Wizard of Oz"-like plot filled with heroes, villains and mythological creatures who lead a tender heroine back home on a journey of self-actualization.

But it is good to know, going in, that Dungeons and Dragons has long been touted as a refuge for outsiders of all stripes to escape the cruelties of everyday life and discover their inner power as they play out bigger-than-life stories.

And isn't that what the best theater does, too, for many of its writers, directors, performers and even audience members?

Theater, as we know, can be the safest of all spaces for sensitive young people to declare their independence from the limiting confines of stereotypes and their community's norms, by trying on different personas while standing in front of an audience and saying, in effect, "I am so much more than you think I am."

All the cast members of "She Kills Monsters" did just that, wowing me with their commitment and courage. Lucy Rogers and Maya Krah, in the show's leading roles, both broke my heart and gave me hope for the future. Others, including Sky D'Artell, Orion Moss, Desiree McIntyre, David Katz, Nathan Campbell and Elizabeth Schoen, made me laugh deeply. And Brette Flora, in a tiny but perfectly performed role toward

the end of the play, was the one who started the darn waterworks cascading down my cheeks.

And then there was the plot twist featuring green jello. But on second thought, I'm not going to tell you about that. You'll have to experience that for yourself when you go to the show. But please, for God's sake, bring a hankie, so you don't have to use your sleeve.

"She Kills Monsters" will be performed at 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, Nov. 21 to 23, and 1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 24, at Open Space for Arts & Community. After the show on Friday, Nov. 22, there will be a Q&A mediated by Raffael Boccamazzo, who attended high school on Vashon and is now a therapist who uses Dungeons and Dragons in his work with traumatized teens. After the show on Saturday, Nov. 23, there will be reception and lobby chat with State Senators Joe Nguyen and Emily Randall, who will be in attendance. Nguyen is the first Vietnamese American senator in Washington's history, and Randall is an openly LGBTQ member of the state senate.

For more information and tickets, visit openspacevashon.com. Thursday night's performance is "pay what you can." "She Kills Monsters" has a parent advisory for those younger than 14, due to mature subject matter that includes bullying, homophobia, language and frank sexual discussions.

Recommended:

For those who need more youth theater (which is everybody, because theater kids, with their superior collaborative skills and otherworldly bravery, will save the world) make time to catch "Eat My Shorts," an evening of 10-minute plays performed by Vashon High School theater students, at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Nov. 22 and 23, at VHS Theatre.

Directed by Stephen Floyd, VHS's talented theater teacher, the evening is edgy at some times and comic at others as the students step eagerly into their varied roles. The biggest standout in the cast is senior Joel Wiegner, who completely commands the stage at every turn, but particularly in a scene where he movingly plays a victim of abuse, confronting his abuser in both deep anger and sadness.

Alex Guthery shows a knack for exposing the dark side of seemingly mild-mannered characters and Bright Shannon exudes stage presence in all of her appearances. Spencer Hartley also makes the most of his roles, while more newbie thespians Keagan Edwards and Alex McDonald show great promise.

The show — clocking in at just an hour — has subject matter and language that some parents may find inappropriate for small children, but there are belly laughs and theatrical thrills for everyone else — including an appearance by one brave actor in a full wet-suit and flippers. Admission is by donation, from \$1 to \$100, with no one turned away for lack of funds. The students will also collect non-perishable food items for the Vashon Food Bank. The final performance, on Saturday, Nov. 23, will include a silent auction of dessert items and student artwork, with proceeds raising funds for a group of VHS students to go on a theater and arts education tour of New York City in the spring.



COURTESY PHOTO

Nancy Pearl will be joined by Steve Scher to talk about "Book Lust" at Vashon Center for the Arts.

Joy of reading is the subject of latest 'talk on the rock'

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Nancy Pearl and Steve Scher, well-known Seattle broadcast personalities and old friends, will share the stage in "Book Lust," a conversation about their mutual interest in, as Pearl put it, "all things bookish," at 7 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 24, at Vashon Center for the Arts. The program is part of VCA's Talks on the Rock series.

A voracious reader, best-selling author,

librarian, literary critic and promoter of the pleasure and importance of reading, Pearl often speaks at libraries, literacy organizations and community groups about her favorite books and the benefits of reading. She received the 2011 Librarian of the Year Award from Library Journal and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association the same year. She is also the creator of the internationally recognized program "If All of Seattle Read the Same Book."

Scher is a podcaster, broadcaster, writer, interviewer and teacher. Over his long radio career, he received accolades and awards for his incisive coverage of public affairs, breaking news and his beyond-the-headlines approach to issues and interviews with notable newsmakers. He currently teaches at the University of Washington.

Tickets, \$10 in advance, \$15 at the door and \$5 for youth, are on sale at vashoncenterforthearts.org.