

STAGE & ARTS

A slithering monster brings 'Frankenstein' to life at Minneapolis' Southern Theater

REVIEW: This dance-theater hybrid by Collide is a lot of fun

By Sheila Regan Special to the Star Tribune | OCTOBER 12, 2021 — 8:00AM

Collide Theatrical Dance Company's production of "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" (<https://www.startribune.com/how-collide-theatrical-makes-frankensteins-ungainly-creature-dance/600104166/>) tries to put a spotlight on the story's creator. But it's Shelley's Creature that steals the show.

Renee Guittar is a marvel as Dr. Frankenstein's monster. With strings of hair hanging over her face, she moves like an animal, crawling as a slithering wretch in early scenes. Later, she makes great use of isolated body parts to create a disjointed, erratic beast.

Patrick Jeffrey brings a childlike vulnerability to the role of Frankenstein. In his lab, where set designer/technical director Robin McIntyre has created a delightfully strange flashing machine, the character seems downright giddy. The scenes between the doctor and the Creature pop with an ecstatic energy. Jeffrey also demonstrates considerable acting skill as he works through the discovery of just how much havoc his experiments have caused.

The fictional story is told so well that the use of Shelley's own story line as a framing device detracts from it. The production, co-directed by Heather Brockman and Regina Peluso, covers too much ground.

The first 15 minutes move quickly through key parts of Shelley's life, from her upbringing in early 1800s England to her romance with poet Percy Bysshe Shelley — a taboo relationship (he was married to someone else) that estranges them from society. They embark to Switzerland for a now-infamous summer with her stepsister and larger-than-life poet Lord Byron. Following a prompt by Byron, Shelley came up with the idea that would become her masterpiece.

As the performance progresses, the many tragedies Shelley experienced are interspersed into the story. While it's probable that the author drew from her own life, [her own introduction to the novel \(https://romantic-circles.org/editions/frankenstein/1831v1/intro\)](https://romantic-circles.org/editions/frankenstein/1831v1/intro) suggests a stronger force was her mind itself. Drawing from conversations about Darwin, she brilliantly imagined science that hadn't even been invented yet. The role of pure imagination cannot be discounted.

Despite that quibble, "Frankenstein" is a lot of fun, with an upbeat soundtrack made of pop tunes from the likes of Billie Eilish, Rag'n'Bone Man and Lana Del Rey underscoring the fictional sections. The theatrical dance vocabulary is sprinkled with elements of hip-



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Collide Theatrical's "Frankenstein" is a dance/theater hybrid with a surprisingly graceful (and female) monster. Betsy Nelson

hop moves. The ensemble performs together well, and strong dancers play smaller roles, including Brian Bose, who portrays Lord Byron with extravagant panache.

For her part, Betsy Nelson carries the role of Mary Shelley with open-hearted strength and pathos.

Frankenstein

When: 7:30 p.m. Wed.-Sat. & 2 p.m. Sun. through Oct. 24.

Where: Southern Theater, 1420 S. Washington Av. S., Mpls.

Tickets: \$45-55. COVID vaccine or negative test required, along with masks.

Virtual version: Available Oct. 29-Nov. 2. \$35.

Info: 651-395-7903 or collidetheatrical.org (<http://collidetheatrical.org>)

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Sheila Regan is a Minneapolis arts journalist and critic.
