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Upstream Theater's Mesmerizing Production of BLOOD WEDDING

St. Louis, MO

Federico Garcia Lorca's tragic play, Blood Wedding, which Upstream Theater is currently presenting, is given a lyrical translation by Langston Hughes and a stunningly dark adaption by Melia Bensussen. From the opening moments until the final blackout, there's an intensity rarely found in theatrical productions, and only the coldest of souls will not be moved by the expected, but still deeply disturbing, ending. Superb work is culled from all the actors by Philip Boehm who has a real talent for delivering exceptionally atmospheric mood pieces such as this.

A mother bemoans her lot in life, having lost her husband and other sons to violence, and she wishes there were no pistols or knives in the world so that such things wouldn't ever happen. Her son is on the cusp of getting married, but even this joyful event doesn't stop his mother from seeing only the gloomy side of life. Meanwhile, the bride to be seems oddly uncertain about her impending marriage, and seems to pine for a lover she gave up some ten years previous. This lover, named Leonardo, is a brooding man, who has lost whatever love he had for his current wife, and sets a chain of events in motion on the couple's wedding day which can only end in tragedy.

Elizabeth Ann Townsend delivers a moody performance as the Mother, wary of all men after what happened to her own family. Michael James Reed is properly ebullient as the Bridegroom who doesn't foresee the potential danger that lies ahead. Julie Layton is terrific as the bride to be, who can't let go of her past, even though she knows it can only bring danger and heartbreak. J. Samuel Davis is equally good as Leonardo, the man she lusts for, and who in turn, burns internally for his lost opportunity. Linda Kennedy is also impressive in a variety of roles including a neighbor, a concerned servant, and a beggar, who is actually Death in disguise. Peter Mayer also doubles up nicely as the genteel father of the bride, and the ubiquitous moon that shines down to reveal the pair as they try and elude the wedding party.

Jef Awada, Aaron Orion Baker, Kelsea Victoria McLean, and Alessandra Silva add outstanding support, while guitarist extraordinaire Lliam Christy provides the Spanish-flavored background music.

Philip Boehm's direction is impeccable as always, using stylized movement to convey the action on the brilliantly minimalistic stage designed by Michael Heil. Michele Siler's costumes are a perfect fit for the action and the location, and Steve Carmichael works wonders with his smartly conceived lighting scheme.

Upstream Theater's presentation of Blood Wedding is a mesmerizing and haunting production that should not be missed. This spellbinding production continues through October 23, 2011 at the Kranzberg Arts Center.