

Theater review: Whatever it is, 'Shoggoths' is must-see theater

[Joanne Engelhardt](#) May 15, 2019 at 3:01 am



Dragon Productions Theatre's current play is "Shoggoths on the Veldt," featuring, from left, Tasi Alabastro, Lisa Burton, Ronald Feichtmeir and Arika U. Spencer-Koknar. (Photo credit: Lance Huntley)

Leapin' lizards!! Shazam! Sock – pow – kazam!

That's what you'll be saying when all of your senses are assaulted by the remarkably excellent production called "Shoggoths on the Veldt," running through June 2 at the redoubtable Dragon Productions Theatre in Redwood City.

This distinctly unusual, hilariously delicious adventure comedy is not to be missed. It's rather a combination of "Indiana Jones and Any-of-His-Adventures," "Around the World in Eighty Days" and Whack-a-Mole.

And oh-so-funny.

All of the above is most particularly due to the astonishing performance of Aika U. Spencer-Koknar as Lady Euphonia Riggstone, an amazing Amazon if there ever was one. Spencer-Koknar owns every moment she's on stage, which is almost all the time, and her comedic timing – especially on double entendres — is superb.

Only slightly less formidable is a little wisp of a man named Ronald Feichtmeir as Lady Riggstone's late, sweetly lamented fiancé, Lord Melford Pumbleshire, who has expired, so to speak, while in Deepest, Darkest Africa (according to the mostly funny announcements which appear frequently above the actors).

Forget about trying to follow the plot. It's convoluted, sometimes overly repetitious, even tedious at times. And so much dialogue! There are times when you just want to tell Lady Riggstone to button it. Some of the jokes – especially when the dead-undead Lord Pumbleshire repeats his letter to his beloved over and over again – get stale.

But director Bora "Max" Koknar does his best to keep things moving with fast-changing scenes and some exceptional (if overly long) sword fights between the two women cast members. (Here's a question for theater lovers: Has this ever happened on stage before?) Fight choreographer Mike Fatum certainly deserves credit for making the fights look real – especially those clanging big swords the ladies use.

The fights are always between the intrepid Lady Riggstone and her former-

friend/now archrival, Lady Phillipa Bickleford-Smith-Jones, a diminutive, but assertive Lisa Burton. It's a hoot to watch them claw, stab and rip each other to pieces in one scene. Unfortunately, in this play Burton's British accent and somewhat low register make some of her lines unintelligible.

The other two cast members, Tasi Alabastro as "famed explorer Welton Mountcrag and Michael Weiland as Crompt, Steward, etc., etc., have varying degrees of believability with Alabastro finally coming to life only after he is knocked senseless in Act 2, and Weiland coming into his own when he becomes the sinister Arnulf in a flowing black gown.

There is one additional character in "Shoggoths:" It's the Shoggoth herself (named Betsy ... though not sure why). Obviously it's difficult to create an authentic-looking amoeboid tentacle monster, as Koknar calls her, so this one sometimes looks more like a handful of wavy elongated (very elongated!) string beans. At times Betsy looks more funny than scary, but ... oh, well, it IS supposed to be a wacky adventure tale.

A big round of applause goes to scenic designer Nathanael Card (who also designed the lighting) for coming up with a simple way to change sets between an English office to a ship to "deepest, darkest, Africa" circa 1889 many times, and each time in a mere few seconds.

In fact, the creative crew is huge for this production because it includes animation, puppets, the aforementioned fight choreography, dialects, as well as the usual light, sound and costumes.

So kudos to Jonathan Covey (sound), Kathleen Qui (who creates some fantastic costumes), Jacob Vorperian (animation and projections), Kate Martin (puppet designer and properties master), Melinda Marks (dialect coach), Samantha Ricci (puppetry coach), and cast member Weiland, who also serves as fight captain.

It's too bad that the audience really doesn't get much of a look at the supposedly magical statue, which is rather nondescript and small. (Even when it's shown above in silhouette, it doesn't look like much.)

Music adds a lot to "Shoggoths," both at the beginning and end, as well as during other pivotal times in the plot.

Though it's overlong and sometimes too talky, Dragon's staging of this play is worth seeing, mostly for Spencer-Koknar's performance and for the humor. As the commanding Lady Riggstone says at one point when deciding to go to war: "We're British. That's what we do ... we forage." And then she downs a shot of whiskey.

Jolly good!

Note: In conjunction with the play, Dragon Theatre offers the Riggstone Records Escape Room, which will run Friday through Wednesday afternoons and evenings in May. Tickets are \$20 per person, or \$110 for a group of six.

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Theater review

What: "Shoggoths on the Veldt"

Where: Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway St., Redwood City, CA 94063

When: Thursday-Saturday, 8 p.m.; Sunday, 2 p.m.

Through: June 2

Tickets: \$29-37; \$15 rush tickets on Thurs. and Fri.; 650-493-2006 or www.dragonproductions.net