

# Life in LAMORINDA

## The Making of Jekyll and Hyde

By Sophie Braccini



Jekyll (Ryan O'Donnell left) and Hyde (Chris Hayes right) surround Elizabeth (Ginny Wehrmeister) Photo Stu Selland

Clive Worsley likes a good challenge. To open its 2010/2011 season, the Artistic Director of Town Hall Theater is presenting Jeffrey Hatcher's adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic 1886 novella, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The new production is guaranteed to send chills down the spines of Lamorinda audiences.

We met the director and cast during one of their last rehearsals. The power of the play was already there, and it is rated PG-13 for good reason. As Worsley puts it, it is a psycho-sexual drama, and the actors carry the intensity of the emotions beautifully.

The story of *Jekyll and Hyde* is no 'chick-flick.' Amy Goodheart, a Town Hall board member, recently commented, "This is the perfect play to take the men in your life."

We all know the story of Dr. Jekyll transforming into his evil side, Edward Hyde, after ingesting a potion of his own creation. What's new in Hatcher's adaption and Worsley's interpretation is the way the seduction of the dark and dangerous side, that's been lurking in humans for all ages, is explored.

The play presents the different faces of malevolence by using four different actors to play Hyde. At one point, during an interaction

with the coveted Elizabeth, all 4 voices are there. The effect is terribly powerful. "It takes a little time for the audience to get acclimated to what is going on" admits Worsley, "but they get into it and the story just grabs you."

Costuming is minimal; the transformations happen through the acting, the voices, and the movement. For Worsley, the choice of his actors was key. "I did individual and group auditions to see how people work together, how they move," said the director. On stage, the play sometimes resemble a rhythmic dance, the light goes up on one side, then the other, and people move in space and time with precision and alacrity. "The play is both precise and physical," says Worsley, "the actors are well in their bodies, and they have an intelligence of the text and bring intensity with some of the emotions."

Ryan O'Donnell plays a very likeable Dr. Jekyll. Worsley chose him because his truthful and simple acting draws the audience to immediately trust him. O'Donnell's rendition of the emotions of the character is believable - you feel for Jekyll, you want him to win the inner battle that's overpowering him.

Charming Ginny Wehrmeister plays Elizabeth. Both vulnera-

ble and strong, she is not a helpless victim in the play. "Not anyone in this story is simply a victim," says Worsley, "each character has an agenda, they are propelling their own story forward."

Two of the actors playing Hyde (and other roles) are Chris Hayes and Dennis Marquam. "Chris is our technical director, he designed the set for the show, runs our comedy series, and is an amazing improviser, much like a chameleon; he was a clear choice for the role," says Worsley. Marquam is a Town Hall favorite who, according to Worsley, always delivers very solid and thoughtful work.

On stage, the mastery and talent of the actors succeeds in ma-

terializing Worsley's vision to have different actors play the same role, and different roles played by the same actor.

As usual at Town Hall Theater, a teen shadow cast will have two performances of its own. "The teens are doing unbelievable work," said Worsley, "I am impressed by the level of maturity and skill for actors of their age."

When the play is over, the audience does not feel that it has found the key to why we are all attracted to the shadowy side of our nature. "The difference between those who act it out and those who repress is quite thin," believes Worsley, "the play doesn't propose to give answers to those questions, but we ask ourselves those questions in a new light."

**Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde** runs October 2 to October 31, with previews on September 30 and October 1. It is rated PG-13 (for adult situations) and is about two hours long. Showtimes: 8:00pm Thursday, Friday, Saturday; 2:00pm Sundays, October 10, 17, 24; 7:00pm October 31. Tickets at the Theatre Box Office at 283-1557, or online at [www.TownHallTheatre.com](http://www.TownHallTheatre.com). Town Hall Theatre is located at 3535 School St., Lafayette.

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