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Dark Dreams: Nightmare at Rheem Theater

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I'm a chicken-I admit it. I flinch at thunder storms, close my eyes during scary movies. It took me years to look the Wicked Witch of the West in the eye, and just hearing the music to The Exorcist gave me the heebie jeebies. So what was I doing, voluntarily going to inspect The New Rheem Theatre haunted house?

"We'll be right behind you," said writer Cathy Tyson. And she meant it - yours truly had to go first. Gulp! A little background first, to delay the inevitable: Dark Dreams is a Rheem Theatre fundraiser benefitting the California International Film Festival (CAIFF). The creepy maze is a "behind the screens" look at all things dark and twisted. It is the work of three women: Joanne Foy, vice president of CAIFF, Maevis Padgett, and Julie Christensen, who is the lead designer and the one whom Foy labels "most twisted."

Foy used to decorate her home and garage for her children's Halloween. When they outgrew that, she turned to producing haunts for non-profit fundraising. Starting in mid-September, the crew put over 100 hours of work into building the set, and use a dozen live monsters. "This is not your mother's haunt," cautions Foy. Scary or not, the set is professional theater quality, and fully fireproof. It's safety first, says Foy, who arrives to greet Lamorinda Weekly staff wearing a green reflective vest.

After a nudge from behind, I was ready to sell my soul and enter the haunt. It's totally dark in here - I'm already on guard, and slightly disoriented. Crouching like Igor, I take a tentative step forward. Spooky music and cobwebs assault my ears and skin. Nervous laughter ensues from the group-or is it only a figment of my frightened mind? Haunted houses equate with sensory overload, or in the case of sight-underload - it's still dark in here! Ghoulish

living dead inhabit the maze, going about their daily (perhaps I should say "nightly") chores. Up ahead is a rattling door-don't make me turn the corner! More nervous laughter and we've come around the bend. Better that than going off the deep end, which you might do going through this alone. Without giving too much away I can say that even escaping from the maze is a fully claustrophobia-inducing experience. Dark Dreams is rated 9 out of 10 skulls on the Haunted World website (<http://tinyurl.com/3ngjk8m>). "You'll have to sleep with a light on," says Foy.

The haunting continues October 28 through Halloween evening, 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., and is recommended for ages 10 and up. Admission is \$8, and proceeds benefit CAIFF. A special "lights on, no monsters" session for younger children, and chickens, will be held from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Halloween -I'm so there.



Photos Andy Scheck

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