

KYMEN SANOMAT, TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 13, 2005

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LOVE EVEN CONQUERS DEATH

Hamina-Helsinki Performance of Dracula Exudes Experience

Bram Stoker's classic vampire novel about the life and death of Count Dracula has fascinated artists working in different media over the years. In addition to many movie and stage versions, the theme has been the subject of a recent ballet version for television that has won many awards.

The theme's enduring popularity among artists is not necessarily a source of wonder because who among us would not dare in their romantic fantasies to believe in love eternal that would survive even such an unfortunate intervention as death. It took an amazingly long time for **Don Linke's** rock opera version to reach Finland—the work was completed as early as 1997.

Without attributing excessive kudos to the home cast, it is pleasant to note the Saturday evening's Nordic premier was brought about through the energy of an entirely South-East Finland cast and the result leaves nothing to be embarrassed about, quite on the contrary. It is worth bragging that we, too, have the expertise!

A musically full-blooded whole

Linke's rock opera has obviously been strongly influenced by Francis Ford Coppola's splendid, opera-like movie version. The movie was almost an opera without actual singing. Linke's opera, except for a few stretches of dialog, is written for music throughout. It varies from heavy rock to unvarnished love ballads, the whole being very harmonious and suitably dramatic for the tale's turn of events, the music being somewhat "heavier" at times and likewise the feelings of the main characters and events. The tale unfolds cleanly with music and song after the translation by **Kari Pyrhönen**.

A fair-sized stage was constructed for the performance in Hamina's Bastion and the band, under Conductor Tuukka Tuunanen's baton, played in the wings. The band acquitted itself well of its exacting task and the acoustics in the Bastion were excellent on the whole. The stage décor was relatively sparse, and as the performance took place in the Bastion's historical setting, I tended to imagine the events taking place in the passages of the surrounding battlements. If Count Dracula ever in fact came to Hamina, one could easily surmise he'd make the Bastion his hiding place of choice just because of its historical atmosphere.

Director **Jalle Niemelä** said he wanted primarily to bring the audience an experience and he has undoubtedly succeeded in doing so. The audience really liked what it saw and heard. The performances will resume at Helsinki's Savoy Theater 9.14.-18 (and Lappeenranta 10. 12-13). It remains to be seen how the performance will jive with Helsinki audiences, but this Hamina-Helsinki collaboration has created a splendid whole.