

Chilling performance scared even the locals

CHRIS KRIDLER • SPACE COASTING • February 18, 2010

Brevard County was representin' in the Big Apple last weekend.

A handful of us, fragile tropical flowers that we are, were taken out of the hothouse and thrust into the aftermath of Snowmageddon. Some sledding was involved as one couple took to pieces of cardboard in Central Park and bumped their rumps down a snow-covered rock.

We sampled edgy restaurants that handed us gasp-inducing bills, such as that for the gorgeous and delicious morsels of Eleven Madison Park, and learned to ask for the tap water. We tried amazing bars that actually stock rye whiskey and other liquors exotic to most local watering holes; the cocktail concoctions created by the consummate professionals of Death & Company were almost magical.

But we were really there to see a friend, a Space Coast actress, perform Jeffrey Hatcher's creepy adaptation of "The Turn of the Screw" in the historic Merchant's House Museum, an authentic 19th-century Manhattan home with original furnishings that was the perfect setting for this sinister version of Henry James' classic.

Christina LaFortune, who's been seen often on local stages, perhaps most memorably as Blanche in "A Streetcar Named Desire" at the Henegar, played the governess who feels she must protect the innocence of two orphans in an apparently haunted mansion. She is by turns earnest and unsettling as she discerns the intentions of the ghosts; but is she the only one who sees them? As she dances between loneliness and madness, Vince Gatton plays the roles of the narrator, the children's uncle, the housekeeper and the boy, to chilling effect.

Our friends commented that this "Turn" had some of the qualities of a radio play, in that our imaginations were allowed to run wild, and they did. The production, with its evocative setting and beautiful costumes, had no props, but the house and the actors provided all the scary structure it

needed.

The small audience, lining two adjoining rooms on folding chairs that were, essentially, set amid the action, couldn't help but get involved. Let's just say even hardened New Yorkers visibly jumped at one particularly blood-curdling scream.

The modern sensibilities lent this old story by the play and the cast gave it an edge that had us all talking afterward as we shivered on to a restaurant and then our hotels.

Two Turns Theatre Company, after its six sold-out performances, has visions of taking its shows on the road -- maybe right here to Brevard County. Its productions promise a happy symbiosis of theater and culture that could bring attention and audiences to historic sites like Merchant's House.

It's about time we were haunted. And at least it won't be snowing.

To learn more, visit twoturns.com.

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