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# Theatre Three Presents A Most Aesthetically Pleasing Sherlock Holmes; There's Big Gay Fun In Forbidden Broadway; Spelling Bee Gets Too Complicated

By Elaine Liner

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Jeffrey Schmidt



Even without the pipe, Theatre Three actor Chuck Huber's sexy Sherlock Holmes is smokin'.

Details:

Sherlock Holmes in the *Crucifer of Blood* continues at Theatre Three through September 5. Call 214-871-3300.

Forbidden Broadway! continues at Kalita Humphreys Theater through August 29. Call 214-219-2718.

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee continues at Onstage

Sherlock Holmes as hottie? **Theatre Three** has him in actor Chuck Huber, starring as the title character in *Sherlock Holmes in the Crucifer of Blood*. With a seriously stylish steampunk-influenced production directed by Jeffrey Schmidt, Dallas' oldest theater-in-the-round dares not to be square (for once). And at the center of the action is Huber, tall and handsome, biting into a deliciously authentic upper-crust British accent with a sexy, growly voice.

The 1978 play was and is the best known work of the late playwright Paul Giovanni, who drew on the characters and intricate plotting style of Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes stories for a newly imagined theatrical thriller. Theatre Three's staging (reviewed at a preview) is so lively and interesting to look at it even manages to overcome the script's talky, balky 30-minute "prologue," which lays out the back story of three British soldiers guarding a maharajah's palace in India in 1857. A box of stolen jewels falls into their hands, and they sign a blood oath to split the booty and never reveal the secret of how it came into their possession (murders were involved). A Hindu curse on the purloined treasure then follows them, with tragic consequences for the next 30 years.

We don't get the first glimpse of Sherlock until halfway through the first act, when the story jumps to 1887 and the lights fade up on the troubled genius tuning his violin in the parlor of 221-B Baker Street. He's twitchy from his cocaine habit and snappish at his assistant, Watson (played by another swoony young actor, Austin Tindle, in his first role at Theatre Three). A pretty girl (Hilary Couch) arrives in a frantic dither. Her father (Aaron Roberts), now retired from the British army, is lost and feared dead in the opium dens of London's East End.

in Bedford through  
August 22. Call  
817-354-6444.

Subject(s):

[Theatre Three](#), [Uptown  
Players](#), [Onstage in  
Bedford](#), [Jeffrey Schmidt](#)

As Holmes and Watson search for him, they stumble onto the curse of the "crucifer," the document smeared with bloody thumbprints from three decades before. A mad major who ends up as a grinning corpse (the nimble Gregory Lush), a homicidal pygmy (John Franklin), a leper and the always bumbling Inspector Lestrade (Jakie Cabe in both those roles, lightening the proceedings with sly comic timing) complicate Holmes' investigation. Not for long, of course.

Watching Holmes and Watson untangle the knots of eight murders is reasonably entertaining. Watching them do it on Jeffrey Schmidt's elegantly decrepit, remarkably mobile scenery full of giant clock gears, flywheels and rusty turnkeys is like peering at old pen-and-ink illustrations come to life. In steampunk layering of classic Victoriana and heavy industrial machinery, with touches of whimsical futurism and dashes of gothic romanticism, Schmidt sets a shadowy, ghoulish mood that just fits the fog and murk of a 19th century London where no sunlight falls and death lurks just down the next alleyway.

Complementing Schmidt's work as director and scenic designer are impeccably constructed costumes created by Aaron Patrick Turner. He dresses the characters in exaggerated silhouettes and surprising textures. No capes and deerstalker caps for Holmes. Instead, the detective looks more like an Edwardian dandy who's a bit strung out on coke and too busy gathering clues to crimes to have his collars starched or his trousers pressed. His hat sports vintage aviator goggles. And he wears groovy eyeglasses with a tiny magnifier lens attached.

The girl, lovely and winsome as she flirts with Watson, gets a sharp black and white ensemble with gathered sleeves, a wasp waist and sky-high heels under lace-up gaiters. Dig the bit of red lace glued above her right eyebrow. ("Is that a birthmark?" whispered a confused patron.)

Makeup by Kristin Colaneri borders on the vampiric, with black coal-dust eye shadows and gray smudges dusted under everyone's cheekbones.

Aesthetically, this is Theatre Three's most sophisticated show...maybe ever. It all works of a piece, adding brilliant artistic panache to a rather pedestrian, if occasionally witty, whodunit.

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There's not a serious moment in ***Forbidden Broadway!, Uptown Players'*** latest at the Kalita Humphreys Theater on Turtle Creek. The satirical 100-minute R-rated musical revue, created by Gerard Alessandrini and directed here by B.J. Cleveland, takes sharp claws to many of the divas and duds of the Great White Way over the past 20 years.

From a cast of eight performers—Beth Albright, Melissa Farmer, Tyce Green, Jim Johnson, Drew Kelly, Sara Shelby-Martin, Shane Strawbridge, Wendy Welch—come impersonations, damn good ones, of dozens of Broadway's best-loved and most-loathed stars. Strawbridge does an uncannily accurate impression of hammy tenor Mandy Patinkin singing "Somewhat Over Indulgent" to the tune of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Welch rolls out in a wheelchair as an octogenarian Carol Channing, still begging to play Dolly Levi. Farmer captures the manic energy and limited vocal range of Miss Minnelli in "Liza One Note." Shelby-Martin, as Ethel Merman, berates Johnson's half-masked Michael Crawford for needing electronic amplification to sing the lead in the *Phantom of the Opera*. "We had voices then!" she squawks. And yes, she did.

Green, a 20-year-old newcomer from Houston, had the opening night audience shrieking at his

drag-glam Patti Lupone, belting "Everything's Coming Up Patti" as she gnaws and grabs scenery and then stops her number to scream at the rowdy fan who dares to snap a photo from the audience (if you haven't seen the Patti-Goes-Wild YouTube video that inspired this bit, stop and look for it right now).

*Rent, Les Miz, Wicked, Chicago, Into the Woods, Mamma Mia, Spamalot, Cats, Hairspray* (stage and movie versions), *A Chorus Line* and even beloved musical moppet Annie undergo a going over in this high-leerious send-up of all things Bee-way. You don't have to be a show queen to get all the jokes in *Forbidden Broadway*, but if you know one, take 'im with you to explain them during intermish.

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If you haven't seen ***The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*** yet, you're sure to trip over it soon. The William Finn musical about six geeky adolescents competing for the county spelling trophy looks to be the new *Rocky Horror*, popping up over the next few months at community theaters and on college stages around North Texas. Right now it's at **Onstage in Bedford**, a small community playhouse that's been doing interesting work lately.

With this show, however, director Kyle Macy has mucked around with *Bee's* deceptively simple concept. Six young adults always play the kids, but here the actors, with one exception, overdo the cutesy stuff, pulling faces and throwing themselves around like limp rag dolls. Jeff Walters plays hippie child Leaf Coneybear in such a state of physical spazz-out it's hard to understand what he's saying or singing. As star speller William Barfee, Nathan Erwin takes a disarmingly self-possessed character and makes him into a rude little bully.

In the Bedford ensemble, only Amanda Gupton, as neglected latchkey kid Olive Ostrovsky, trusts the material enough to be small and still when she approaches center stage for her solo. Her plaintive song to her absent mama (nicely sung by Kristin Spires, who also plays the bee's emcee, Miss Perretti) is a highlight. The rest of this production is just an m-e-s-s.