

“N is for Neville, who died of ennui!” Oh, what a perfect match: Halloween night, the fearlessly inventive Sacred Fools Theater Company, and the delightfully perverse and most peculiar tales of the infamous late-great Edward Gorey!

Leave the bags filled with tricked-for treats for the kiddies to pig out on and head to the Fools’ theatre, my adventurous readers, as the highly original *Gorey Stories*, adapted from some of the master’s best known work by Stephen Currens and featuring a suitably discordant original musical score by David Aldrich, offers a swell way to spend your upcoming holiday without having to dust off your favorite Darth Vader costume from the back of the hall closet. Gorey’s signature neo-Victorian characters come to splendid life here under the skillful hand of director Pat Towne, who also appears onstage as terminal opera fan Jasper Ankle, one of the wonderfully committed and decidedly Grand Guingol-esque participants in the drama.

Still, maybe the best thing about this respectfully twisted group of *Gorey Stories*, even surpassing a knockout and fearless ensemble cast which includes the likes of LA theatre’s highly respected *über*-clown Joe Fria and the superbly Winona-Ryder-in-*Beetlejuice-y* Ryan Templeton, is the make-up, hair and costuming whipped up by our town’s most creative counterculture designer Ann Closs-Farley.

Looking as though the outfits and characters walked right off the pages of Gorey’s classically warped black-and-white illustrated collections, Closs-Farley has outdone herself yet again, which is saying something more amazing than anyone could realize if you haven’t seen her work before, especially in the Evidence Room’s annual holiday *99-Cent Store* extravaganzas.

Cricket Sloat’s wildly effective lighting, William Levine’s crescendoing sound design, and art director Joel Daavid’s charmingly Gothic set also show only the highest regard for Gorey—particularly Daavid’s towering two-level uniformly monochromatic playing area with huge arched gothic windows and crumbling faux brickwork which ingeniously allows this eclectic cast of characters to sweep through one entrance and escape through another with great ease, even popping up occasionally floating or cycling past the stage mansion’s omnipresent picture window with a pointedly pastoral view that would make Gorey himself smile.

And what a cast it is doing the sweeping: Joe Jordan as a Lurch-like butler Harold, Kelley Hazen as the evening’s overly-dramatic hostess Lady Celia, Jenifer Hamel as poor sad Mary Rosemarsh, Lola Ward as the hilariously howling songstress Ortenzia Caviglia, Henry Dittman as tortured *Unstrung Harp* author C.F. Earbrass, and the doll-faced Paul Punkett as the resident woeful brat Little Henry, are all totally splendid in their roles, but it’s still the rubber-limbed Mr. Fria as Gorey’s goofy swain Hamish and Templeton as moaning maid Mona who set the bar for performance here.

And just when you’d think my admiration for *Gorey Stories* is fulsome enough, I also offer the highest of praise to musical director Graham Jackson, who leads an exceptional and properly idiosyncratic band made up of Jackson himself on keyboards, Gary Viggers

on the bass, Kat Edwards on violin, and particularly Douglas Lee making musical magic with a set of water glasses and a wonky, warbling saw. Happily the musicians are placed onstage, making them seem almost as though they are characters themselves. *Gorey Stories* is imaginative, refreshing and just plain fun—and no one couldn't have brought it to life better than impressive fools who live under the bridge of the 101 at Sacred Fools.