



Grief, Guilt, and Paranoia: Poe in October, How Perfect!

A Live Theatrical Experience Reviewed by Julinda D. Lewis

At: Hanover Arts and Activities Center, 500 S. Center Street, Ashland, VA 23005

Performances: October 16, 23 & 30, 2020 @5:00PM [Recommended for ages 13+]

Ticket Prices: Pay-What-You-Can

Info: <http://www.WhistleStopTheatre.weebly.com> or (804) 798-2728 (Venue)

On Friday evening (October 16) the rain let up just in time for a live “pandemic appropriate” performance of *Grief, Guilt, and Paranoia: The Madness of Poe*, staged under a wide-spreading tree on the spacious lawn of the Hanover Arts and Activities Center. It was a cool 55 degrees and cloudy, but not uncomfortable. Attendees are required to bring and wear a mask as well as a lawn chair or blanket to sit on. (I would also advise a blanket for the cool weather.) About a dozen people claimed socially distanced in squares marked off in the grass as a pre-show playlist of Poe-inspired songs filled the air. (Three trains passed on the nearby tracks during the 45-minute show, but the program was so riveting the interruption was negligible.)

I don't like to know too much about a show before I see it, so as not to be unduly prejudiced before I get there, so *Grief, Guilt, and Paranoia: The Madness of Poe* was a total surprise. Whistle Stop Theatre Company's founding artistic director Louise Keeton conceived of *Grief, Guilt, and Paranoia* as a multi-faceted work that includes multiple historical and artistic influences. It takes place, for instance, not far from a home once occupied by Poe's childhood sweetheart (and later fiancée) Sarah Elmira Royster Shelton. Created in partnership with the Ashland Museum, the work includes three voice artists representing the different “voices” of Poe (also represented by three different masks created by Keeton).



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Those familiar with the life and work of Edgar Allan Poe and those who are not may relate differently to this work that uses Poe's own poetry, original music by Paul Loman, and choreography by Katherine S. Wright. Wright, who eerily embodies Poe (wearing theatrical masks and a long-coated suit), doesn't ever speak, but rather uses pantomime and dance in a riveting and passionate display of non-verbal communication while Poe's words are voiced by Lucretia Marie, Barbara Keeton, and Craig Keeton. Sophia Manuguerra is the vocalist, and all the voices and music were created and recorded virtually.

The artistic choices – including Keeton's masks and artwork by local artists that is all being auctioned off – are diverse and unconventional, making them all the more appropriate for the subject at hand. In addition to honoring and appreciating the poetry of Poe, *Grief, Guilt, and Paranoia* is about missing the people we love and the ways in which that can drive us mad – an obvious reference to the current pandemic and our similar and diverse reactions to it.

Grief, Guilt, and Paranoia digs into love and loss, life and death, verbally and visually mining the depths of “Annabell Lee,” “Elenora,” “The Premature Burial,” “The Telltale Heart,” and of course, “The Raven.” The Hanover Arts and Activities Center had already constructed a small stage under a tree, and Keeton and company added three black cubes with hinged lids that provided all the set, the furniture, and the props needed for this production.

There are two remaining performances of *Grief, Guilt, and Paranoia: The Madness of Poe* on October 23 and 30. To view and bid on the art work visit the Whistle Stop Theatre Company's website: whistlestoptheatre.weebly.com. Opening bids start at \$10 for the masks and prints, and \$5 for artwork delivered via high res digital files. All bids are due before October 29, 2020.

Edgar Allan Poe Trivia



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The Baltimore Ravens NFL team is named for Poe’s poem, “The Raven” and the team mascot is named Poe.

Poe married his first cousin, Virginia Clemm when she was 13 and he was 27.

To this day, the cause of Poe’s death remains unknown. In 1849 he “went missing” for five days and was found, delirious, in Baltimore. He died in a Baltimore hospital and was buried two days later, without an autopsy.

Photos: From the Whistle Stop Theatre Company website. Katherine S. Wright as Poe.

A slideshow of auction items follows.



