

Week of
September 23-29,
2004

Features

Search AC Wee

[Home](#)
[Cover Story](#)
[Features](#)
[Editor's Column](#)
[Pinky's Corner](#)

[Casino](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Casino Lounges](#)

[Dining](#)
[After Dark](#)
[Movies](#)

[Coasting](#)
[Social Sightings](#)
[Smart Gambling](#)
[Car Talk](#)
[Ask the Geator](#)
[No Place Like Home](#)
[Sports](#)

Both Sides Now

'Jekyll & Hyde' an undisputed winner

By Steve Angelucci

Search



IT'S RARE TO FIND A casino show that's anything other than pure entertainment geared to keep the high rollers happy, upbeat and ready to invest more funds. Transcending those parameters is Trump Plaza's *Jekyll & Hyde*, a serious musical offering a healthy dose of drama.

This is the third production in the Broadway on the Boardwalk series produced by Al Parinello and Chris Giannini of Jersey Shore Entertainment. The first, *Singin' in the Rain*, received unanimous rave reviews and set a new criterion for Atlantic City musical productions. According to Parinello, the musical will soon open at the Hard Rock Casino in Hollywood, Fla. The second production, *Footloose*, while fun and entertaining, didn't approach the stellar quality of *Singin' in the Rain*. *Jekyll & Hyde* does, and adds some magic of its own.

Although it lacks the flashy dance sequences of the aforementioned productions, *Jekyll & Hyde* more than makes up for them with Frank Wildhorn's exceptional musical score. Wildhorn and Steve Cuden adapted the story for the stage based on the book and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse. It, in turn, is based on *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a novella by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Set in London during the late 1800s, the play eerily begins with unearthly voices and sounds ominously foreshadowing the story of Dr. Henry Jekyll and his struggle with the forces of good and evil. We learn that Dr. Jekyll's father is a patient and it's possible that Jekyll's research could help him recover from dementia. Appropriately, Jekyll sings "Lost in the Darkness."

While this story may seem familiar due to the many Jekyll and Hyde movies, this production gives it new life. One highlight is the insightful "Facade," as sung by an assorted group of beggars, gentlemen, sailors and ladies of the evening. They tell us of the pretense we show to the world while hiding our inner persona. The play draws us into the world of Dr. Jekyll and



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HOME
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graphically demonstrates how his formula reveals the good and evil within. As the evil runs amuck, we are horrified, yet fascinated by the consequences.

Director Elizabeth Lucas deftly guides her actors through a psychological drama turned musical, bringing the characters to life. Rob Richardson is excellent in the dual role of Jekyll/Hyde. Without the benefit of extensive makeup or the special effects of film, Richardson is able to convey the character's metamorphosis from good to evil and vice versa. As the play unfolds, one is both sympathetic to and repulsed by his characters. Richardson, a certified personal trainer in New York, has performed this role in three separate productions.

The beautiful Holly Holcomb is outstanding as Lucy, the prostitute who falls under Hyde's spell. The University of Hartford graduate (BFA in Musical Theatre) previously starred as Dorothy in *Summer of '42*, Kate in *Kiss Me Kate* and Mother in *Ragtime*. As lead vocalist, Holcomb enlivens the audience in the cast's provocative and festive song "Bring on the Men."

Other luminaries are Erin Davie who plays Emma, Dr. Jekyll's fiancée, and Erik Schark who portrays Stride and is a Jekyll/Hyde alternate. Stride shines as a member of the board of governors of the hospital opposed to Jekyll's research. As one of Emma's suitors, he asks her to reconsider her upcoming marriage to Jekyll. Davie's sensitive "Once Upon a Dream" solo and "In His Eyes" duet (with Holcomb) are standout performances.

Atlantic City native Jay Aubrey Jones portrays lawyer John Utterson. Jones recently performed in *Footloose* at the Trump Plaza. The stage veteran's previous hometown appearance was in *Mary, Mary* at the Dennis Hotel in 1974. His extensive career includes stage, film and television credits, including roles on *One Life to Live*, *Guiding Light*, *As the World Turns* and *All My Children*.

After auditioning almost 900 actors, Artistic Director Steve Steiner selected 18 cast members. All are members of Actors' Equity, the union of professional actors and stage managers. "We began rehearsals only 11 days ago," says Steiner who directed *Singin' in the Rain*. "This is a completely different cast from *Footloose* except for one actor [Jones]."

Unfortunately, live musicians did not perform the score. "The music was recorded by musicians using synthesizers and tailored to fit within a 90-minute time frame," Steiner says. The time frame is mandated by the union and calculated by the number of shows performed per week.

Although *Jekyll & Hyde* tells the story of a brilliant, yet troubled, soul dealing with the duality of good and evil, this production has no schizoid qualities. It is a straight-ahead exceptional dramatic musical that, according to more than one theatergoer, compares favorably to the Broadway production. Chalk up another winner for Trump Plaza and Jersey Shore Entertainment.

Jekyll & Hyde will be performed at Trump Plaza, Boardwalk at Mississippi Avenue, Atlantic City now through October 31. Showtimes are Tuesday at 2pm; Wednesday, Thursday,

Saturday and Sunday at 2 and 8pm and Friday at 8pm. Tickets are \$25. Call 1-800-736-1420.

[back to top](#)

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