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He's good Dr. Jekyll! He's evil Mr. Hyde! Either way, he sings!

By Keith Kreitman, CONTRIBUTOR

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A MUSICAL I made from Robert Louis Stevenson's somber, Gothic novel "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" — are you mad? A musical about the struggle of good and evil, each striving for dominance in the heart and mind of a single man? What to expect?

What I got was not what I expected. "Jekyll and Hyde" is a major production and may be one of the best Palo Alto Players shows in recent years.

Outstanding in all respects: direction and choreography by George Quick, sets by Kuo-Hao Lo, costumes by Mary H. Cravens, wigs by Rande Harris, props by Pat Tyler and even outstanding lighting and sound by Ed Hunter and Grant Huberty that contribute mightily to the moodiness of the subject.

There is also a super score — music by Frank Wildhorn, lyrics by Leslie Bricusse — with powerful songs rivaling "Phantom at the Opera" and "Les Miserables," all executed to a turn by music director Matthew Mattei and his orchestra.

But above all, there's the cast.



TORN BETWEEN TWO LOVERS: Dr. Henry Jekyll (Cliff McCormick, center) is torn between his experiments and the women in his life, dance hall girl Lucy (Melissa T. O'Keefe, left) and his fiancée, Emma Carew (Colette R. Phelps), in the Palo Alto Players production of "Jekyll & Hyde." Photo by Joyce Goldschmid

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I can think of no more challenging male role in musical theater with a greater personality span from the upper-class Dr. Henry Jekyll, a sweet, gentle and moral creature, to the ugliest manifestation of evil that was Mr. Hyde. Leading man Cliff McCormick travels back and forth upon that road with an award-worthy performance, both in singing and acting.

Close behind is Melissa T. O'Keefe as Lucy, the lower-class London "Carmen"-like brothel entertainer, whom he comes to love as Jekyll and

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destroys as Hyde. What a terrific voice for dance hall singing!

Yes, we all know the story about Jekyll, a scientist looking for knowledge, chemically dividing the good and evil in his own body into two separated personalities, thus allowing Mr. Hyde to become his agent of destruction.

Destroy he does, right up to the final confrontation, when each side fights for dominance within the one body and neither wins.

Along with the leads, this is an outstanding cast. John Brewer is John Utterson, Jekyll's best friend and attorney. A beautifully voiced Colette R. Phelps is Emma Carew, Jekyll's upper-class fiancée who loves him to the last and Howard Stateman is Sir Danvers Carew, her distinguished father.

Scattered among the cast of characters are those who have stood in the way of Jekyll's scientific striving and are destroyed by his alter-ego, Hyde, and the common folks from the brothels and the foggy streets of London.

All are operating behind the facade of social correctness

of late 19th-century Victorian England.

Others in the cast include Ron Tanon (Simon Stride), Edmond Kwong (Sir Archibald Proops), Danny Martin (Lord Savage and Spider), Matt Hays (General Lord Glossop), Mary Horne (Lady Beaconsfield and Nellie), Jeremiah B. Clauss (The Bishop of Basingstoke), Mischa G. Stephens (Poole) and David Murphy (Bisset).

It is easy to understand why this somber musical survived for more than 1,500 performances on Broadway and garnered a number of Tony nominations.

Yes, Virginia, if you can believe it, Robert Louis Stevenson's novel has been turned into a musical, and it works.

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