

Edgy thriller keeps audience members glued to their seats

Wait Until Dark By Frederick Knott; a Cheyenne Little Theatre Players' production When: Oct. 31 to Nov. 9; Fridays and Saturdays, 7:30 p.m.; Sundays, 2 p.m. Where: Atlas Theater, 211 W. 17th St. Tickets: \$18; \$16 for seniors; \$10 for students More info: 638-6543, www.cheyennelittletheatreplayers.org.

Reporter: Karen Cotton

By Karen Cotton
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Rick Hammond is partial to psychological suspense and thriller dramas.

Tonight on Halloween, Hammond is making his Cheyenne Little Theatre Players directing debut with Frederick Knott's play "Wait Until Dark" at the Atlas Theater.

"When I read the script, I liked how it was well-written," he said. "It was a new, good challenge for my directing debut.

"I liked the suspense and I'm more of the suspense and thriller fan. I'm not a big horror fan. For this time of year, I like something that gives you a good suspense."

Hammond chose the script in part because he remembered seeing the movie on TV as a teen.

During the last 20 minutes of the show audience members are asked to stay in their seats.

"It's pretty dark because of the different lighting effects that we use," Hammond said. "It's hard to see if they're walking out, and hopefully we've got them enjoying the show enough that they don't want to leave."

The suspense builds until the very end of the show.

"Wait Until Dark" is about a woman who has been blind for nearly a year, is a newlywed and lives with her husband in a Greenwich Village basement apartment in New York.

"Two con men had her husband smuggle a heroin filled doll back into the country for her," Hammond said.

The cast is comprised of roles for a woman, a young girl, and six men.

"I had a very good selection at auditions - around 25 who tried out," Hammond said.

An 11-year-old graduate of the summer Cheyenne Little Theatre Players Academy landed the only children's role in "Wait Until Dark."

Jonni Marie Wiltse plays Gloria in "Wait Until Dark."

"She was the best one that we saw," Hammond said of Continued from D1 Wiltse.

Wiltse's confidence that she displayed during her audition is why Hammond cast her.

"She was starting to memorize portions of the script while she was auditioning,"

Hammond said. "We had them read several different scripts and portions of it, with several combinations of people. She had already memorized portions of that cutting that she had done before during the audition."

The challenge in this show is for actress Shannon Skelcher, who plays the lead Susy Hendrix, to portray a visually impaired character.

"We've done the blindfold, so the actress can learn about being blind," Hammond said.

"We had her contact a lady here in town who is visually impaired, as well, so she can talk that out with her."

The timing and pacing of the show is critical to building suspense.

"If it slows down, you don't get that sense of danger and urgency that you otherwise get," Hammond said.

The show is rated PG, he said, because it's a psychological thriller.

Hammond said he's sure most kids have watched more violence on TV, but recommends that the show is for children 12 and older and it's up to the parent's discretion.

"There is a little violence and the mature content of the drugs," Hammond said.

The last three rehearsals for "Wait Until Dark" took place this week.

Hammond said his actors are in very good shape and are ready for opening night.

The theater's programming committee selected Halloween night as the opening date.

"I'm very excited that we open on Halloween because it's an alternative to the horror movies and other Halloween parties," Hammond said.

He added that they won't turn any ticket holder away if they come in costume or not, anyone is welcome.

His favorite part of his debut as a director tonight is "watching the show come together as it developed from the bare stage to it being ready to open now."

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Jonni Marie, playing Gloria at left, helps Susy, played by Shannon Skelcher, to pick up some dishes in the Cheyenne Little Theatre production of "Wait Until Dark." The play opens Oct. 31. Larry Brinlee/staff



Dale Williams, playing Mike, Aaron Dreury, aka Sgt. Carlino, and Brooks Reeves as Harry Roat are starring in the Cheyenne Little Theatre Players production of "Wait Until Dark." Larry Brinlee/staff