

TWU Drama in darkness shines light on ‘the ugliest woman in the world’

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DENTON — The depiction of one woman’s tragic life story challenges the audience to look beyond what is presented onstage by casting the theater into total darkness as the Texas Woman’s University Department of Drama presents “The True History of the Tragic Life and Triumphant Death of Julia Pastrana, The Ugliest Woman in the World.”

The production will take place in the Margo Jones Performance Hall, located at Oakland and Sawyer streets on TWU’s Denton campus. Performances are scheduled at 4 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 3; at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Nov. 4-5; and at 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 6. Ticket prices are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. The play contains adult language. For reservations or more information, call the TWU Box Office at (940) 898-2020.

Performers will move about the theater, and limited seating is available on the stage, pulling the audience into an environment where the smell of popcorn and the sounds of a carnival mask a deep ugliness.

“The playwright (Shaun Prendergast) requested that the performance take place in the dark,” said TWU Drama program director Sharon Benge, director of this production. “The darkness allows the audience to examine who is the ugliest person in this relationship.”

The play tells the real-life story of a Mexican peasant woman who was sold to a traveling freak show in the 1800s. Julia Pastrana was a physically deformed woman who was covered with black hair due to a condition called hypertrichinosis. She fell in love with Theodore Lent, the man who displayed her in his traveling freak show. The couple married, but Julia died from complications of childbirth in 1860. Their son, who also was covered with hair, lived for three days.

After their deaths, Lent had both bodies mummified and resumed the tour, continuing to exhibit them both. Lent eventually died of a brain disease. The mummies were believed to have been lost for many years, but were found in Norway in 1921. They continued to be exhibited until the mid 1970s, when Norwegian authorities intervened. The mummies were stolen in 1979, but were recovered by police from a dump. They currently are stored at the Oslo Forensic Institute.

D'Lytha Brown Myers of Fort Worth plays the title role, and Thomas Stratton of Krum fills the role of her husband. Other cast members include Jamie Hogue of Brownwood, Lindsay Turman of Lamesa, Frances Seman of Wylie, Brista Hurst of Kilgore, and Jaymes Gregory of Fort Worth.