

Theatre Review: David Arquette's 'Sherlock Holmes' Cheapens Drama With Campy, Unfunny Comedy

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CHICAGO – Different isn't bad and might be great, but you'd better have an irrefutable reason to change what was never broken. *Campy* being the only word to accurately convey this alternate-reality version of Sherlock Holmes with an original script, writer Greg Kramer and director Andrew Shaver try too hard to be different without ever figuring out why.



Play Rating: **2.0/5.0**

This Thanksgiving, spend your time anywhere but with David Arquette's "Sherlock Holmes" at the Oriental Theatre. Thankfully, the one-week limited engagement only runs in Chicago from Nov. 24 through Nov. 29, 2015 until it tours elsewhere.



David Arquette as Sherlock Holmes (center), James Maslow as Dr. John Watson and Renee Olstead as Lady Irene St. John in "Sherlock Holmes".

Photo credit: Starvox Entertainment, June Entertainment

Starvox Entertainment and June Entertainment's "Sherlock Holmes" has stripped out all the mystery, intrigue, tension, drama and danger and replaced it with cheesy, cheeky and campy comedy that doesn't deliver. I'm left feeling pity for all the previous versions of Sherlock Holmes I've seen done right. I could even imagine the original Sherlock actors sitting in the audience – crying beside me.

Attempting for comedy rather than dramatic intrigue, this version of Sherlock blows kisses to his arch nemesis Moriarty – something you'd never see Benedict Cumberbatch, Robert Downey Jr., Buster Keaton, Roger Moore or Basil Rathbone caught dead doing. Never do you feel a dangerous rivalry between them. Even worse, never do you get the sense that you're actually immersed in the darkly disturbed world of Sherlock Holmes.

Going in, I struggled to see David Arquette being able to pull off this role – and for good reason. You get the sense he's a fanboy of the role and it's a stretch that he landed it. "I'm not always necessarily someone's first choice, but I have a little bit of range. I can pull it off," Arquette unconfidently said about playing the title role in this production.



The cast of "Sherlock Holmes".

Photo credit: Starvox Entertainment, June Entertainment

Great actors can chameleon themselves away from a goofy, hair-brained character like Deputy Dewey in "Scream" and transform into the greatest fictional detective that ever was when Broadway calls for it. But David Arquette can't and neither can Greg Kramer and Andrew Shaver, who tried to cast a goofy guy to play a version of Sherlock Holmes we never needed to see.

As for where this plot picks up in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's storied history with this character, I remember hearing mention of opium about a hundred times but never really connecting to why.

"The opium wars have ended. Jack the Ripper has wreaked his havoc. Electricity is on the rise and Scotland Yard is in its infancy. Lord Neville St. John gives a moving speech in the House of Lords to ban opium and a vote on the matter is imminent.

"Meanwhile, notorious criminal kingpin Professor James Moriarty plots to thwart the upcoming opium vote. When a drowned body is discovered and Lord Neville goes missing, Scotland Yard turns to 'the world's only consulting detective' and newest resident of 221-B Baker Street: Mr. Sherlock Holmes."



David Arquette (right) and Renee Olstead in "Sherlock Holmes".

Photo credit: Starvox Entertainment, June Entertainment

Even reading this plot line now reminds me of how little of it I connected to or cared about during the show. I have utter respect for bold thinking and bringing back a beloved story to restage it in a new way (and profiting from doing so). When you stray from drama and try to cut into comedy, though, your first mission is simply to be funny. This Sherlock Holmes just isn't.

My face stayed disappointingly deadpan, my voice mostly monotone and my head kept being confused – unable to answer why this live show would devolve into this campy retreat. The opening-night Chicago audience was relatively quiet, too. The show only earned interspersed chuckles rather than laugh-out-loud bellows, intermission couldn't come soon enough and the curtain call came and went with the sold-out crowd ready to go home.

"Sherlock Holmes" has a limited, one-week engagement at the Oriental Theatre from Nov. 24, to Nov. 29, 2015. Tickets range from \$21 to \$87 and are available at BroadwayInChicago.com [19]. More information about the show is available at SherlockHolmesOnStage.com [20]. "Sherlock Holmes" stars David Arquette as Sherlock Holmes, James Maslow as Dr. John Watson, Renee Olstead as Lady Irene St. John and Kyle Gatehouse as Professor James Moriarty from writer Greg Kramer and director Andrew Shaver.



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