

## They're coming to see the killer...

By Kyle Jackola  
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A homicidal elephant, a dark muddy town, and a circus show with blood on their hands; the Brevard College theatre department brings all this and more to center stage in their production of George Brant's *Elephant's Graveyard*.

College students, local residents, and out-of-town visitors all gathered in the Morrison Playhouse on Thursday night to see the story of the fateful day Charlie Sparks' circus came to Erwin, Tennessee.

Sparks, played by Addison Dent, is the ringmaster and one of many narrators in the show.

The play is told entirely in the past tense, each character giving brief monologues that slowly reveal the narrative one grizzly detail at a time. At times the pace of the monologues seem almost on the verge of frenzy as each character abruptly picked up where the last one left off, but what else would you expect from a circus?

Other circus members and townsfolk also weigh in on the story, and the perspectives from each individual leave out bits and pieces to be filled in by others as the play progresses.

What many audience members may find unique about this play isn't necessarily the plot or mode of story telling, but rather that a large portion of the cast are portraying live performers.

The element of "performing like a performer" gives the show an almost over-rehearsed feeling that makes the real actors seem like they're working too hard to be convincing.

Audiences of plays aren't normally bombarded with the notion that the play is a show in and of itself, and yet *Elephant's Graveyard* goes above and beyond in its efforts of presentationalism to remind the audience over and over that the characters the actors are portraying are also performers themselves.

The antithesis of the overbearing performance-driven circus is found in the naturalistic townsfolk of Erwin. All the townspeople seem in many ways more real

that the circus people, and with that sense of realism a tinge of darkness lingers as well.

But, is *Elephant's Graveyard* really such a dark play? At a cursory glance, perhaps, but director Brandon Smith has a different opinion.

"It's easy to see the filth and the darkness in this play," says Smith in his director's notes. "Mary was a captivating creature, a symbol of something miraculous. Her death was horrific, but because of the event we are left with "a dream, a legend that can go on" and ultimately make change for the common good of all creatures great and small."

Smith furthers his point with a quote from author Chuck Palahnuik. "If you can change the way people think...you can change the way people live their lives. That's the only lasting thing you can create."

For the town, the circus is a dichotomy of expectation and anticipation contrasted against fear of an unknown and unpredictable world. The incidents leading to the climax challenges the normalcy of the townspeople's lives, and they in turn react in a violent and animalistic way that leaves the audience to wonder if all humans are capable of such deplorable actions, even if grounded in honest and moralistic intentions?

Acting and directing aside, set design and costuming also contribute largely to the play's presentational style. Scenic and lighting designer Andrea Bocanfusso brings the world of the circus and the town to life with her own artistic stylings.

Dirt, hay, and other natural elements are brought inside in order to bring the audience to the town, and at one point a big top is raised in the theatre as a performing arena for the circus.

Lighting, too, plays a key role in developing the story as spots flash between characters during monologues and colors change alongside the changing feelings of the townsfolk and circus members.

Costume designer Ida Bostian shows us again that she is capable of bringing characters

to life with specific costuming choices and designs for the production. Costuming is an integral part of any circus, and Bostian's designs bring a unique, yet nostalgic feel to the show.

Reactions to the opening were positive all around. Brevard's president Dr. David Joyce and wife Lynn sat in the front row and were blown away by the presentation and professionalism of everyone involved in the play. "The performance was outstanding and the subject matter challenging," said Mrs. Joyce. "It really is applicable to everything in life."

A large number of students who attended also had positive things to say about the performance. "I'd say it's one of my top three favorite shows I've seen at Brevard College," said senior Audrey Hamilton. Hamilton and others came out not just to be entertained, but also to support friends and celebrate their hard work on the production.

*Elephant's Graveyard* plays through the weekend with evening performances at 7 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and a Sunday matinee at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$5 each and can be purchased in town at Southern Comfort Records on W. Main Street, online at Etix.com, or at the box office 30 minutes before the start of the show. Don't miss your chance to see what's sure to be a memorable show at Brevard College. After all, it isn't everyday the circus is in town.



Andrew Gunnin as the clown.