

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

MCT's 'The Addams Family' delivers delightful campy charm



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Quick Take

With a cast brimming with energy and just the right dose of spooky camp and darkly funny charm, "The Addams Family" delivers a delightfully offbeat night at the theater. From Gomez's irresistible appeal to Wednesday's drop-dead performance, Mountain Community Theater brings the mix of gothic gloom and laugh-out-loud comedy to Ben Lomond.

Driving up the winding roads to Ben Lomond for a night at Mountain Community Theater feels like a small adventure in itself – but once you arrive, the reward is immediate. Park Hall buzzes with an enthusiastic crowd that clearly loves their local theater company. On opening night, the energy was infectious from the moment we walked through the doors. A playful pre-show playlist set the tone, beginning with "Monster Mash" and transitioning into darker tracks, such as Radiohead's "Creep" and Blue Öyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper" – a clever progression, perhaps only the most attentive listeners caught.

By the time the lights dimmed, the sold-out theater was clapping and stomping along to the overture – the atmosphere was downright electric. When the curtain finally rose on a foggy cemetery and the Addams clan appeared in silhouette, the room erupted in shrieks and cheers. The crowd was ready for fun – and "The Addams Family" delivered.

"The Addams Family" musical, with music and lyrics by Andrew Lipa and a book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice (of "Jersey Boys" fame), brings the macabre and ooky cartoon/TV show clan to the stage with a new twist: Wednesday Addams is all grown up – and in love. When she falls for a "normal" boy from Ohio named Lucas Beineke, she confides

in her father, Gomez. She begs him not to tell her mother, Morticia. That secret sets the stage for a dinner party gone awry when the Addams host the Beinekes at their eerie mansion in the middle of Central Park. Amid graveyard ancestors climbing out of their tombs to meddle, torture devices and tango lessons, the evening spirals into comic chaos, forcing both families to confront love, loyalty and the importance of accepting one another's quirks.

Since its Broadway debut in 2010, this show has become a favorite worldwide, thanks to its beloved characters and darkly humorous charm. Now, the Addamses have crept into Santa Cruz County, bringing their mix of gothic gloom and witty comedy.

Director Daria E. Troxell clearly knows how to bring out the best in her cast. She has a clear, creative vision and interprets an "Addams Family" with fluid, dynamic staging and impact. Under Jesse McMilin's direction, the seven-piece band – fittingly dubbed The Cryptomaniacs – gave the score both drive and playful menace, keeping the energy sky-high. And this production has energy and pizzazz in spades – enough to raise the dead several times over. It's a laugh-out-loud romp powered by a cast clearly having the time of their (after)lives.

Ana Bogren's Wednesday is stellar. With the shadow of Netflix's "Wednesday" series looming large (the most popular English-language TV title ever on the streaming platform), Bogren proves she can carry the mantle. Her glowering deadpan could freeze a soul at 50 paces, but when she lets her guard down to declare her love for Lucas, it's a splendid execution. And that singing voice – fierce, clear and commanding.

If you go

Who: Mountain Community Theater

What: "The Addams Family"

When: Through Oct. 19

Where: Park Hall, 9400 Mill St., Ben Lomond

Tickets: <https://mctshows.org/buy-tickets/>



From left: Daemon Nowatzki as Pugsley, Ana Bogren as Wednesday, Amy Carlson as Morticia, Gage Herendeen as Lurch, Dave Leon as Gomez, Maia Mosher Yates as Grandma and Sarah Marsh as Fester in Mountain Community Theater's production of "The Addams Family," playing through Oct. 19. Credit: Davis Banta

Dave Leon as Gomez is irresistibly lovable. With a bold singing voice and mischievous twinkle, he straddles humor and heart beautifully. Daemon Nowatzki nails Pugsley with the bratty-little-brother vibe. He's one talented kid – he can sing, he can act, and he's downright funny – definitely one to watch for in future local productions.

Sarah Marsh as Uncle Fester is a clownish delight. Her rubber-limbed physical comedy had the audience howling. While she seemed hesitant vocally, her performance was so gleefully off-kilter that it hardly mattered. Her kooky, eye-bulging antics were adorable. Maia Mosher Yates gave Grandma some uproarious, shining moments, while Amy Carlson's Morticia managed a chilly detachment – precisely what you want from a character who's equal parts ice queen and gothic goddess.

And then there's Gage Herendeen as Lurch – the evening's ultimate scene-stealer. As the lumbering Frankenstein-ish butler, his droopy deadpan face and garbled words were hysterical, leading to a moment in Act II, that is pure surprise.

The ensemble of Addams ancestors deserves its own ovation. Draped in ghostly white and grey costumes, they never broke character – even while frozen in the background. Their makeup was impeccable, their movements eerily precise. Watching them added layers of texture that made the entire production pop.

On the "normal" side of the family, MarNae Taylor and Kip Allert were warm-hearted, convincing and funny as Lucas' bewildered parents, reacting with escalating confusion (and occasional fascination) to the Addams household. Zed Warner as Lucas matched Bogren's Wednesday with a boyish sincerity and warm vocals, giving their romance just enough heart to anchor all the zaniness swirling around them.



Addams Family dinner (left to right): Amy Carlson as Morticia, Daemon Nowatzki as Pugsley, Maia Mosher Yates as Grandma, Sarah Marsh as Fester, Ana Bogren as Wednesday, Gage Herendeen as Lurch, Zed Warner as Lucas, MarNae Taylor as Alice, Kip Allert as Mal and Dave Leon as Gomez. Credit: Jana Marcus / Lookout Santa Cruz

The creative team deserves serious credit for such high production values. Lighting designer Tristan Fabiunke conjured moods that swung from eerie moonlit glow to gothic grandeur. At the same time, Lars Fabiunke's two-tier set gave the broken-down mansion depth and mystery that enhanced the story.

Costumes by Abby Halper and Susan McKay were a triumph—especially the ancestor outfits, which looked like they'd floated out of a haunted oil painting. Perfect style, perfect fit. Makeup artists Laurie Becker and Brenda Leach created the pale, otherworldly faces that contributed to the ensemble's striking appearance. Props, too, deserve applause – Gary Lepori's clever touches, like the scuttling hand of "Thing," added just the right dose of whimsy.

All told, this "Addams Family" is a scream – a cheeky, spooky, campy romp with just enough heart beneath the cobwebs. It's a production that makes the trip up the mountain more than worthwhile. And, as Wednesday says, wrestling with her secret, "If I can't be who I am ... if I have to pretend ... then it's not the real me." It's a reminder that being weird, kooky and unabashedly different isn't just acceptable – it's something to celebrate.