

# Sherlock Holmes

A play by Greg Kramer

Reviewed by Alan Rettig

Variety is the spice of life when it comes to interpreting Sherlock Holmes on stage and screen, and I thought I'd seen it all--or at least most of it. I've always been open-minded about the many iterations of the Master, and have enjoyed the creativity and freshness that so many writers, directors and actors have brought to Baker Street. But you have to draw the line somewhere, and that somewhere is the new play *Sherlock Holmes* by Greg Kramer, starring David Arquette.



Holmes has gracefully survived and often triumphed when faced with time shifts, age shifts, comedy send-ups, cartoons and non-canonical scripts and pastiches of varying brilliance. That's because most writers understand the touch points that define the detective, and honor those traits no matter how far from the Old Queen's England they take him. But Holmes simply cannot survive the case of relentless schizophrenia that Kramer and director Andrew Shaver have concocted, even though the play is anchored in Victorian London. Arquette's Holmes is whipsawed between verbatim recitations from the Canon and rank childishness, without warning or motivation. Whenever glimpses of a credible Holmes begin to show through they're instantly snuffed out by a bad joke, a silly giggle or an affected prance upstage--none of it helped by Arquette's annoying habit of muffing some lines and mumbling others.

But if Arquette is occasionally redeemed by Doylean soliloquies, the supporting cast members are pure caricatures. Boyish James Maslow is cast as Watson, and we find him at our hero's side just a week after meeting Holmes and coming to Baker Street. His fawning devotion would be more appropriate to an adoring son than a trusted companion and biographer, but in any event his role amounts to little more than stage candy. As Moriarty, Kyle Gatehouse's brand of evil is more comic book than Conan Doyle. His deeds are suitably heinous but his words are persistently bland, and his ubiquitous red suit does little to add gravitas. Renee Olstead takes the role of Lady Irene St.-John, not exactly The Woman, and not exactly what she seems, yet she manages to stand out by bringing some good dramatic chops to a character that is a bit less goofy than the circus that surrounds her.

The script takes chunks of "The Empty House" and "The Man With the Twisted Lip," along with plugs and dottles from *A Study in Scarlet* and other tales, tosses them all into a blender and ends up with much ado about the predictable. The audience has a pretty good idea where things are leading, but getting there is a bizarre maze of quick and often unmotivated plot devices, unfunny sight gags, cheesy jokes, all capped by a second-act ensemble dance without music that left some members of the audience truly dumbfounded.

After the play, four of us ducked into a restaurant across from Washington's Warner Theatre where the waitress asked if she should go see the show. We asked if she was a Sherlock Holmes fan and she said no, not yet. We suggested she skip the show and read the stories.

*Sherlock Holmes, original script by Greg Kramer, directed by Andrew Shaver, with David Arquette, James Maslow, Renee Olstead, based on the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. 2015 tour dates: Los Angeles October 15-18; Toronto October 27-November 8; Washington November 17-22; Chicago November 24-29.*