

A tour of Capote's home — banana peel and all

► **CAPOTE**
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from the moment he critiqued his portrait.

The upside of my naivete is that I was relaxed, not awed. Then, as now, I was a woman of substance, to a point. Well-educated, well-traveled, observant. I knew a little about a lot. A lot about very little. I debated whether I was deeply superficial or superficially deep.

Capote gives us a turn around his living room. On the table below the portrait is a banana peel, delicately carved from ivory. "People think I'm a slob when they see that, but it's art!"

We perch on the couch. In the photo in *Mademoiselle's* August 1968 issue, Capote is laughing, though it has been a bitter-sad week. He has just returned from the Kennedy compound in Hyannis. His good friend Bobby, who was to be featured in the magazine, had been assassinated in a Los Angeles hotel days earlier.

"I assume everything is going to turn out for the worst, and when it doesn't that's just so much gravity," Capote says.

"I don't think America is more violent than any other country, although recent events don't seem to bear that out. Speaking of statistics, did you know that 8 percent of all hitchhikers have served some time in prison?"

We didn't. He tells us he is sure the Supreme Court will rule capital punishment cruel and unusual punishment, because of the rarity with which it is enforced. That so-called student rebellions are just a "kind of grim fun," a desire for identity. "I can't see seeking notoriety as a group, as a mass movement. The hippie communities, too, have to conform. You might as well be living in Shaker Heights."

We five in our summer linens are aspiring editors, not rebels. My brown and white plaid dress, damp in the small of my back on this hot June afternoon, is cinched at the waist, a bow at the decollete.

The writer talks about writing, claiming his material chose him.



Truman Capote: "I assume everything is going to turn out for the worst, and when it doesn't that's just so much gravity."

The serious artist, like Proust, as opposed to a mere craftsman, is "like an object caught by a wave and swept to shore, obsessed by his material. It's like a venom working his blood and the art is the antidote."

His sprightly tone dims, now reflective. "Sometimes the drone of the talk shows helps me fall asleep," he tells us. "Last night I suddenly realized they were talking about me. It was boring. There is a certain kind of serenity that comes with that feeling."

I leave his apartment thinking about liberal leaders assassinated that spring — Martin Luther King and RFK, about whether the venom of writing is in my blood, that I needn't go abroad to meet strange people. Daisy Miller is a tad less innocent.

The pace picks up in the 2nd act of 'Lestat'

► **"LESTAT"**
From Page D1

It's too much story, with the authors almost desperately shoe-horning some of Rice's plot turns, narrative flights and interminable vampire creation myths into a song here, an overstuffed confrontation there or the large-scale video animation sequences that blanket the set. The characters prove even more problematic, but then, despite her creative departures from Rice's novels, very few of the figures in Woolverton's script have much character.

Of the three who inhabit both books, Louis — the narrator of "Interview" (which makes up most of the second act) — is a peripheral, one-dimensional image of unrelieved angst, strongly sung by Jim Stanek. Armand, very capably performed by an enigmatically commanding Drew Sarich (the understudy for the departed Jack Noseworthy), is pretty much the fundamentalist villain he'd become in the second book. Lestat, the uncommunicative dark menace of the first book, is much more the interminably loquacious, questing vampire of the sequel.

He's the narrator of his own story, the narrative popping up on the scrim as he types his tale on a laptop — a device that grows old very fast. As he narrates, the scene shifts from a modern office to the 18th French century estate where he was raised; to Paris, where he becomes an actor and a vampire, turns his mother and his best friend into vampires in turn, confronts Armand and leaves on his quest for deep knowledge; and eventually (we're in the second act now) settles in New Orleans, where he makes the vampires Louis and, Rice's most intriguing invention, the child vampire Claudia.

A vivid array of scenic projections — gothic interiors, deep forests, Parisian and New Orleans cityscapes — upholster the large moving flats and arches of Derek McLane's inventive sets (the visual concept is by graphic-novel artist Dave McKean, with sculptural lighting by Kenneth Posner). Hyperactive animation sequences less successfully serve as special effects for the battle with wolves and bloodsucking episodes. Susan Hilferty's costumes — vivid and ghostly, historical or wildly imaginative — help keep us apprised of where we are and when.

None of this matters much, though, unless Lestat is endlessly fascinating, which is another



Photos by DARRYL BUSH / The Chronicle

Hugh Panaro as the vampire Lestat in the new musical at the Curran Theatre.



Hugh Panaro, top, as Lestat and Jim Stanek as Louis, the vampire he "makes" in New Orleans, in "Lestat."

problem. Woolverton and Taupin have had to truncate so much story that they've barely sketched in the main character. Hugh Panaro, who plays the role, is tall, reasonably dashing and sings with a big, powerful voice, but seems lost in his long stretches of dialogue. His speech is rhythmic and unconvincing, which is all the more bothersome given Woolverton's only partial success in enlivening Rice's clunky dialogue. Nor does it help that Panaro's acting seems to consist of knitting his brows to indicate fear, confusion, anger, remorse, thirst, joy or pain.

A vibrant Carolee Carmello enlivens the stage as Lestat's mother, Gabrielle, infusing the role with great reservoirs of strength as a dying elder and wonderfully feral enthusiasm as a

vampire. She exhibits a stunning range and force on her solo "Nothing Here," persuading her son to leave for Paris, and sings with great power of the thrill of the hunt in the overblown "The Crimson Kiss." But Gabrielle's stage time is too brief. Too much of the first act consists of Panaro and an attractive Roderick Hill, as best friend Nicolas, looking uncomfortable trying to figure out how homoerotic their friendship is supposed to be.

Some beautifully staged shadow-play theater bits and a masque of vampire ancient history (musical stagings by Matt West) add a bit of spice. Things pick up briefly in the second act with the arrival of Allison Fischer's eerie child, Claudia, espe-

cially with her country-rock warbled "I Want More" — but little of her story is left, and her other big solo, "I'll Never Have That Chance," is one of John's most cloyingly syrupy concoctions. A solid-looking Michael Genet is unconvincing as the sage Marius. The chorus and orchestra perform flawlessly under Brad Haak's musical direction.

The songs, however, range from mildly interesting to, for the most part, banal and virtually undistinguishable. Taupin's lyrics are often woodenly prosaic and rarely advance the story or our understanding of the characters. When he tries to cram information into a song, as in the tale of vampire creation, "The Origin of the Species," the result is simply confusing. John seems to spend most of the evening trying to become Andrew Lloyd Webber at his most rapid and pretentious.

It's the finale that hits rock bottom. Woolverton, Taupin and John try to sum up vampire wisdom in a resolution that reunites everybody in loving-kindness. Perhaps because of Rice's recent reconversion to Catholicism, though, they don't want to get into the flirtations with atheism and heartfelt Mother Earth worship of the "Lestat" novel. What we're left with is pure bland schmalz. For vampires, frankly, that sucks.

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RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

7 a.m. KPFA-FM (94.1): The Morning Show. Authors, artists and activists interviewed.

9 a.m. KDFC-FM (102.1): Mozart in the Morning. Divertimento No. 1 in D, K. 136, and Sinfonia Concerto for Violin & Viola in E-flat.

9 a.m. KPFA-FM (94.1): Democracy Now! Investigative news. Amy Goodman, host.

9 a.m. KQED-FM (88.5): Senate Judiciary Committee Confirmation Hearings. Judge Samuel A. Alito Jr. nominated for Supreme Court associate justice.

10 a.m. KCSM-FM (91.1): Mid-Day Jazz. Four hours of jazz.

Noon. KALW-FM (91.7): Philosophy Talk. "Philosophy and The Law."

Noon KALX-FM (90.7): Women In the Arts. Interviews with women in the performing, literary and visual arts.

1 p.m. KALW-FM (91.7): Commonwealth Club. "Religion & Politics: A

Queer Perspective."

4 p.m. KPFA-FM (94.1): Hard Knock Radio. The hip-hop view of life. Davey D, host.

8 p.m. KUSF-FM (90.3): In the Soul Kitchen with Harry D. Roots and rhythm music.

8 p.m. KDFC-FM (102.1): San Francisco Symphony Broadcast. Faure's *Masques & Bergamasques*; Pollen's *Piano Concerto*. Franz Bruggen, conductor.

9 p.m. KCSM-FM (91.1): Jazz at the Lincoln Center. Pianists Cyrus Chestnut and Benny Green

9 p.m. KALW-FM (91.7): Echoes. Modern ambient soundscapes of music.

10 p.m. KDFC-FM (102.1): Classical Giants at 10 and 10. Glazunov's *Symphony No. 6* in C, Op. 58, "Optimistic."

10 p.m. KUSF-FM (90.3): FreeFall. Digital underground music.

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