

# 'Elephant Man' cast well-suited

By PHYLLIS WALBYE  
RH ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Most people are familiar with John Merrick, a real person, from the David Lynch movie version of "The Elephant Man" with the great John Hurt playing the deformed Merrick under pounds and pounds of grotesque makeup.

Certainly the film was effective, but it deprived the audience of some of the informed power of the Bernard Pomerance play.

## If you go

"The Elephant Man" will continue through July 23 at Bas Bleu Theatre, 401 Pine St., in Fort Collins. Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$12 for seniors (65 and older), \$10 for students. A two-for-one deal is offered for tickets to Thursday and Sunday performances. For information and reservations, call 498-8949 or visit [www.basbleu.org](http://www.basbleu.org) on the Internet.

In the original Broadway production, director Jack Hofsis chose the extremely handsome actor Philip Anglim to play Merrick.

Shining with male beauty, Anglim brought the horrifying essence of Merrick's afflictions to the audience with only his physicality and a fine actor's expression of pain and loss.

David Bowie, then in his most-golden period, took over as Merrick when Anglim left the production. It is a striking role for an actor and makes unique demands.

In the Bas Bleu Theatre Company production in Fort Collins, Stetson Weddle follows in the mekeup-unemcumbered tradition and gives a performance of nuanced clarity, achieving emotional power with remarkable delicacy.

In Victorian England, Merrick, who suffered from the excruciating deformities of then-unknown neurofibromatosis, was brutalized and exhibited as a sideshow freak by a brutal man called Ross (Kurt Brighton).

Merrick was known as The Elephant Man because of a story about the circumstances of his birth and injury to his mother.

Merrick's savior, with motivation not as commendable as it might be, was Dr. Frederick Treves (Robert Reid), who took Merrick into the London hospital where he was engaged in research.

Under his care, Merrick proved to be a man of intellect and spirituality. Treves introduced him to a leading actress of the London stage, Mrs. Kendall (Wendy Ishii), who proved to be a real friend.

She wanted her friends to meet Merrick, and it became fashionable for members of the ruling class to visit him and treat him like a favorite possession.

Beyond a sense of caring and kindness in the poignant story, there are dark human foibles revealed dramatically in this well-cast production directed by Cathy Reinking.



Special to the Reporter-Herald

Ross (Kurt Brighton, left) talks about his exploitation of John Merrick as The Elephant Man to Dr. Treves (Robert Reid).

A cello played beautifully by Sarah Studebaker (on the stage) intones moods, dances, sings, prays and mourns as the drama unfolds.

Robert Reid is effective revealing all sides of Treves, particularly when forced to introspection in a dream sequence staged evocatively by Reinking.

Wendy Ishii gives a perceptive, witty performance as Mrs. Kendall and doubles as one of the provocative sideshow pinheads with Tamara Todres.

J. Michael Scovel is properly

Gomm, the hospital administrator. Greg Clark does well in his four cameo roles.

Most impressive in support is Kurt Brighton in four roles.

He bristles with viciousness as the evil Ross and purrs with piety as an officious church bishop.

The potency that Brighton brings to the show is important because, although Reinking's "The Elephant Man" is always dramatically viable, it could ignite more sparks as it encourages us to examine our judg-