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Heathcliff and Cathy haunt Helena's mansion district

Wuthering Heights

The Myrna Loy
(PG-13)
Grade: B

With empty pockets and few Hollywood connections, young directors are usually forced to dream small when they make their early films.

Not Helena's Bryan Ferriter. Ferriter not only decided to adapt "Wuthering Heights," Emily Bronte's 1847 classic, but he

was determined to be as faithful as he could, money be damned. Guided by an angel, he found a home in England where Bronte

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stayed. German composer Michael Klubertanz worked for love rather than money to drape the film in a lyrical classical score. He even rebuilt a room in the Helena house so that Bronte herself would have felt at home sitting there.

Ferriter and producers Jason

Rogers and Quincey Kuiuava then contributed the funds to make the dream come true.

The result is a heartfelt adaptation of Bronte that captures the dark and stormy nights of Gothic fiction. When the cameras moved inside Wuthering Heights and Kim DeLong walked in the door as the elder Earnshaw, I put the video on pause.

I turned out the lights, put a candle in my bay window and curled up in a throw.

Early in the film, DeLong's

character Earnshaw dies in front of the fireplace.

That scene, shot in Helena, was just too close to home. It's tough to watch without tears. DeLong himself would die two years after the filming. His death left a hole in the arts in Montana.

DeLong's role in "Wuthering Heights" is one of many reasons for the community to celebrate the premiere of Ferriter's film at The Myrna Loy on Friday at 7 p.m.

The cast includes a host of

Montana connections, including DeLong, his daughter Bella, and, of course, Helena High 2005 grad Ferriter himself, who plays Heathcliff.

At least a dozen more local actors appear, including Ryan Pfeiffer, Nathan Mills, Katy Wright, Morgan Roberts, Laura Brayko, Chris Korow, Brock Forrette and Mary Riitano. Riitano, channeling her inner Glenn Close, turns in a captivating performance as

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Nelly, the narrator and faithful servant.

Playing Cathy Earnshaw from the inside-out is Jasmine Jandreau, who flew to Helena from Vienna three times to shoot her scenes. And Ferriter himself is well suited for the dark, brooding Heathcliff.

The indoor scenes were filmed inside a home in Helena's mansion district. Some outside shots were shot at historic Ponden Hall in the Yorkshire Moors around Haworth, but more scenes were shot north of Helena.

Ferriter was careful to frame the film in England, but then to carefully disguise Montana so we hardly know we've switched continents - literally from one cut to the next.

Ferriter suspects Bronte herself must have been overseeing his search for locations.

"We were searching for an exterior in England," said Ferriter. "I told everyone we had to go the home where Emily Bronte was born. I went up to her house and put my hand on it and said, 'Emily, we need to find a mansion.' Then, we got in the car and started driving in the



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Director and Helenan Bryan Ferriter talks about filming "Wuthering Heights" during an interview at Helena's Red Atlas last Sunday

moor district. We saw a mansion on the other side of a lake on a hill. I said, let's just shoot it, we're running out of time. Just then a van pulled up. It was the owner of the mansion. He led us up to the mansion and then asked me if I knew where we were. I said, 'Is that Ponden Hall?' And he says, 'Yes, it is.'

"There's a window there where Bronte was inspired

to write the ghost scene. It was at that moment I knew we were doing her work justice. I think Emily blessed the film."

Cinematographer Jason Rogers, like Ferriter, sought to be faithful.

"Jason shot everything in natural light," said Ferriter, during an interview at Helena's Red Atlas last Sunday. "Some of his shots look like 18th century paintings, just liked

we intended."

Ferriter and Rogers do, indeed, capture the mood of both Bronte's moors and of Wuthering Heights itself. Rogers' camerawork makes the production seem lush, hiding what Ferriter describes as his "micro budget."

Somewhere, Bronte's smiling.

Ferriter is smiling, too.

"It's a dream that I've been working on for six years," Ferriter said. "I'm proud we were able to honor Bronte by bringing her world to life."

Ferriter, Rogers and a number of local cast members will be at the Myrna on Friday at 7 p.m. Zach and Patricia Wirth, owners of the ranch where many scenes were shot, will be there, too. The film will then open a short Helena run before heading to the FLIC film festival in Polson.

"All of us had such close bonds," Ferriter said. "We all believed in this."

Ferriter, who is finishing up his MFA in theater at the University of Florida, has two new productions in mind. One is a personal Montana-based story based on his dad's life, set in Butte. The other project will return to the classics.

"I've played Hamlet on stage," said Ferriter. "Now I'd like to get it on film."

Why dream small?