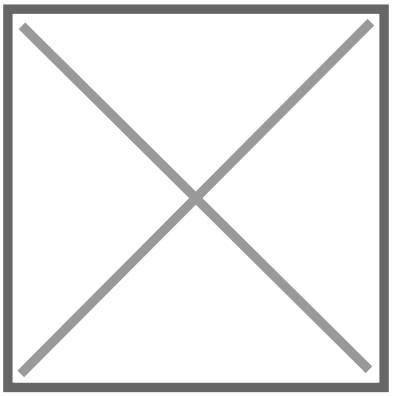


â??Deep Love: A Rock Operaâ?•â?? The Living, the Dead, and the Space Between

Description

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Salt Lake City, UT â?? Every October, *Deep Love: A Rock Opera* rises again, summoning a devoted crowd in funeral attire to the theatre. Created by Ryan Hayes and Garrett Sherwood and produced by the Fairest of Friends Collective, the production has become one of Utahâ??s most enduring cult eventsâ??part rock concert, part ghost story, part sÃ©ance. One of this yearâ??s most refreshing choices was its invitation for the audience to take photos and videos during the performanceâ??a gesture that embraced fan participation and treated spectators as collaborators in the ritual rather than passive observers. Now in its fourteenth year, *Deep Love* remains a labor of love for its cast and community, even as it continues to wrestle with its own identity: Is it a rock concert, an opera, a play, or something in between?

A black and white image depicting two characters from a rock opera. One, with long blonde hair and

An Origin That Refuses Burial

When *Deep Love* first emerged from Rexburg, Idaho and took root in Utahâ??s theater scene, local press praised it as a â??not-to-be-missed theater experienceâ?•â??a haunting mix of rock concert and tragic romance (McLean, 2015). Co-creators Ryan Hayes and Garrett Sherwood were celebrated for transforming a college-town folk opera into a full-scale musical ritual that returned each fall like clockwork. That spirit of community and creative devotion still defines the production today; the audienceâ??s loyalty is as much a part of the performance as the music itself.

But as the years have passed, the mythology surrounding *Deep Love* has grown thicker than the story itself. Even at the height of its national debutâ??the 2015 New York Musical Theatre Festivalâ??critics noted the imbalance between sound and storytelling. BroadwayWorld reviewer Michael Dale described it as â??a lot of passionate beltingâ?• but with â??so little character development and so few dramatic specifics that the evening adds up to little more than a vocal showcaseâ?• (Dale, 2015).

Ten years later, those words still echo. The 2025 production inherits both the passion and the problem: powerhouse vocals, stunning atmosphere, and a story that never fully finds its pulse. *Deep Love*

remains haunted by its own nameâ??a show built on sincerity and spectacle, still searching for the heart that could bring it to life (ShowScore, 2015).

A black and white image of a stage during a performance of 'Deep Love: A Ghostly Rock Opera,' fea

Between Life and Liturgy

Billed as a â??show without dialogue,â?• *Deep Love: A Rock Opera* unfolds entirely through music. In theory, that structure aligns it with classical opera, but in practice it feels closer to a staged concertâ??theatrical in gesture but driven by sound. The four central figuresâ??Constance, Friedrich, Florence, and Old Bonesâ??embody archetypes of love, loss, and vengeance. Yet without narration, scene markers, or projected text, the storyline often drifts in and out of focus.

At intermission, I found myself asking basic questions: Who is alive, who is dead, and why does a skeleton band share the same stage with the living? The music conveys emotion, but not always plot. A simple one-page printed program with song titles and a short summary of what *Deep Love* defines their â??Rock Operaâ?• as could help newcomers navigate what is, for all its emotional intensity, a dense and unfamiliar mythology.

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A character named Old Bones from the rock opera 'Deep Love' plays an electric guitar while dressed

Bones Without Flesh

Visually, *Deep Love* is steeped in gothic atmosphereâ??the undead mingling with the living, a skeleton band presiding over a candlelit stage. The imagery is striking but underexplained. The coexistence of ghosts and mortals feels more aesthetic than narrative, more style than story. Why are these worlds overlapping? What cosmology governs this liminal space between love and death? *Deep Love* never answers these questions.

Atmosphere replaces world-building, and the result is a spectacle without grounding. Death and resurrection serve as powerful metaphors, but here they feel almost ornamental: a costume rather than a cosmology. For a show steeped in gothic grandeur, we need more than vibeâ??we need rules, reasons, and roots. Without them, its haunting beauty risks becoming decorative instead of dramatic.

A person dressed in a skeleton-themed costume with long hair and gothic attire stands against a brig

Echoes Beneath the Noise

Ironically, for a production that relies on music alone to tell its story, one of its missteps was the sound itself. The venueâ??s acoustics were first-rate, but the mix was not. Soloists often disappeared beneath the band, the imbalance muddying lyrics and dulling climaxes.

Thatâ??s a shame, because the performances themselves were earnest and compelling. Aspen Palmerâ??s Constance quivered with restrained emotion, Michael Dunnâ??s Friedrich found gravitas in despair, and Sheldon Bladhâ??s Florence seethed with sharp conviction. Chase McKnight, doubling as Old Bones and co-director, gave the show its gothic anchorâ??not quite a narrator, not quite a

characterâ?? trapped somewhere between lover and judge. The musicians commitment never faltered; however, the sound design didnâ??t do them justice.

A performer in a striking red costume poses dramatically under red lighting, showcasing a confident

Loveâ??s Reckoning

More than anything, *Deep Love* needs to define its stakes. We see characters live, die, and rise again, but we never quite understand whatâ??s at risk beyond heartbreak. If love and death are constant companions, what happens when one triumphs over the other? Whatâ??s the cost of defying mortalityâ??or of surrendering to it? The show gestures toward cosmic tragedy without grounding it in consequence. Without that clarity, every resurrection and revenge feels symbolic rather than shatteringâ??a ghost story gasping for a heartbeat.

Still, for some viewersâ??especially those who have experienced the cycles of control, guilt, and devotion that accompany abusive relationshipsâ??*Deep Love* might hit closer to home. Beneath its gothic aesthetic lies an emotional truth about love that lingers past its breaking point, where suffering masquerades as loyalty and the dead refuse to release the living. The showâ??s haunted world becomes less literal and more metaphorical: a reckoning with what it means to be bound by love long after it turns destructive. That resonance, though powerful, seems accidental rather than earnedâ??emerging from audience projection more than authorial design.

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Every resurrection and revenge feels symbolic rather than shatteringâ??a ghost story gasping for a heartbeat.

A performer in elaborate costume with a serious expression, illuminated by yellow light, features text

Beneath its gothic aesthetic lies an emotional truth about love that lingers past its breaking point, where suffering masquerades as loyalty and the dead refuse to release the living.

A Requiem for the Living

Calling the show *Deep Love* suggests an exploration of intimacy, devotion, or redemptionâ??yet what unfolds onstage feels more like loveâ??s echo: lingering, hollow, unable to rest. Every act of affection leads to destruction; every gesture of loyalty ends in ruin. Instead of examining loveâ??s darker edges, the show seems to conflate love with suffering, as though devotion only proves itself through pain.

That conflation may resonateâ??perhaps uneasilyâ??with audiences who have lived through abusive or controlling relationships. In those contexts, love often does blur with pain; affection becomes currency, and loyalty becomes survival.

> Seen in that light, Deep Love reads less as a supernatural romance and more as an allegory emotional entrapment. A ghostly persistence of relationships that should have died long ago.

Its haunted aesthetic becomes metaphorical: a world where love refuses to release its hold, where the dead linger because we believe they are still owed something.

Yet the production never clarifies whether it understands this tension or merely reproduces it. Love, in its deepest sense, demands transformationâ??a moral or spiritual evolution that gives meaning to its suffering. But here, no one changes. The characters rage, repent, and rise from the grave, yet arrive nowhere new. What begins as gothic romance collapses into repetition: death as metaphor, death as mood, death as aesthetic.

To use â??loveâ?• so freelyâ??and to render it indistinguishable from obsession or despairâ??leaves the piece hollow at its core. *Deep Love* wants to be about eternal devotion, but what it delivers is something far more haunting: a requiem mistaking itself for a love song.

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Its closing, â??Chant of the Dead,â?• when Constance cries, *â??Wake me! Iâ??m cold, so very cold!â?•* and Old Bones answers with the graveâ??s echo, redemption never arrives. Her final linesâ??*â??If my bones should rise again, I pray I never suffer love againâ?•*â??suggest not transformation, but exhaustion. What should perhaps feel like release instead sounds like surrender. The show ends not in salvation, but in silenceâ??a final note too weary to rise again.

A woman in a dramatic costume with lace details stands against a blue background, embodying a ch

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Production Crew

The 2025 production of *Deep Love: A Rock Opera* was co-directed by Liz Whittaker and Chase McKnight, with Andrew Pincock as music director and bassist. Whittaker, a Salt Lakeâ??based director, actor, sound designer, and intimacy coordinator, has helped guide the showâ??s evolution over the past four years, while McKnight reprises his signature role as Old Bones, the ghostly figure at the storyâ??s center.

The creative and technical team includes Brenna Wall (lighting design), Jessica Wall (set design and makeup), Ariel LaFontaine (hair and makeup design), and the Wariner family trioâ??Benjamin, James, and Lilyâ??on live and monitor sound mixing. The productionâ??s visual world, combining candlelit hues and skeletal motifs, reflects the collaborative fingerprints of this long-standing ensemble.

Musical direction is grounded in a veteran band of Utah musicians: Ford Erickson (guitar), Stacie Fleischer (drums), Caleb Wall (keys), Cody Robinson (acoustic guitar), Jordan Jacobsen (guitar), and Candido Abeyta (saxophone). Together, they sustain the showâ??s rock-folk-gothic blend that has become its sonic signature.

The Afterlife of a Cult Classic

What keeps *Deep Love* alive is not its narrative clarity but its community. The audience cheers, sings, and sways like participants in a ritual they already understand. That shared history is both the productionâ??s strength and its limitation: it welcomes the initiated but leaves newcomers in the dark. And perhaps thatâ??s the paradox at the heart of *Deep Love*: a show about letting go that canâ??t stop coming back.

If *Deep Love* hopes to evolve beyond its cult following, it may need to decide what it truly isâ??a rock concert with theatrical flair, a narrative musical with operatic ambition, or a Halloween tradition that thrives precisely because it refuses categorization.

Official Links:

Official Links â?? [Facebook: *Deep Love: A Rock Opera*](https://www.facebook.com/deeploveopera) â?? [Website: deeploveopera.com](https://www.deeploveopera.com) â?? [Deep Love Program](https://www.deeploveopera.com/program) â?? [Instagram: @deeploveopera](https://www.instagram.com/deeploveopera) ð??§ Listen to *Deep Love: A Rock Opera* on Spotify: â?? [Album 1](https://open.spotify.com/album/5Hj8X9KkRccm43bcJPsvAt) â?? [Album 2](https://open.spotify.com/album/70t6jhdN6n8kDWOxoyx7gf)

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2025 Performances

- **October 20â??21, 2025 | 8:00 PM** â?? Mid-Valley Performing Arts Center, 2525 Taylorsville Blvd, Taylorsville, UT 84129
  ð???ï¸• *Tickets:* $36.50 (approx.)
  ð??? *Recommended attire:* Funeral wear
- **Monday, October 27, 2025 | 8:00 PM** â?? Colonial Theatre, Willard Arts Center, 450 A Street, Idaho Falls, ID 83402
  ð???ï¸• *Tickets:* $31.80 (includes taxes/fees)
  ð??? *Reserved seating available via* purchase.idahofallsarts.org

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About the Playwrights

Ryan Hayes and **Garrett Sherwood** first conceived *Deep Love* in 2010 as college roommates in Rexburg, Idaho. What began as a few songs in a college living room evolved into a full-scale production that toured New York, Chicago, and the Pacific Northwest. The work was featured at the **New York Musical Theatre Festival (2015)** and later developed at the **Johnny Mercer Writers Colony at Goodspeed Musicals (2016)**, where it was refined with guidance from leading musical-theatre mentors.

Hayes, known for his work as a singer-songwriter and former finalist on *The Voice*, and Sherwood, a storyteller and musician involved in projects like The By and By and **The Cinderbiter**, continue to shape *Deep Love* as a â??living, breathing organism.â?• Their gothic, guitar-driven vision fuses rock,

folk, and romantic tragedy into a musical ritual that has become a Utah Halloween staple.

Sources

- BroadwayWorld. *Review: Deep Love: A Ghostly Rock Opera at NYMF.* September 13, 2015. Link
- *Utah Stories.* â??Deep Love â?? A Rock Opera.â?• By Emily McLean. September 16, 2015. Link
- *Show Score.* â??Deep Love: A Ghostly Love Rock Opera.â?• New York Musical Theatre Festival, 2015. Link
- *Deep Love: A Rock Opera* Official Website. deeploveopera.com
- *Salt Lake County Arts & Culture.* â??Deep Love: A Ghostly Rock Opera â?? Mid-Valley Performing Arts Center.â?•
- *Willard Arts Center â?? Idaho Falls Arts Council.* â??Deep Love: A Ghostly Rock Opera.â?• purchase.idahofallsarts.org

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