Written by Mike Schulz
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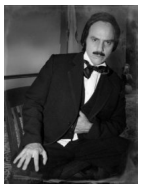

"It must have been around Halloween," recalls actor/playwright Duffy Hudson. "I was nine, and my father came into my room and started reading 'The Raven' to me. And I remember thinking, 'What the heck is this story about? What's this bird doing in this guy's room? And who is *Lenore* ?'

"But instinctively, I knew that it was cool," says Hudson of Edgar Allan Poe's chilling poem. "The way my father read it, it was so ... . It was just so *alive*. And then my father said, 'Why don't we memorize this, and we'll perform it for the family?' And I thought, 'Okay, how cool would *that* be?'"

That reading, says Hudson, "never really materialized. But certainly the interest in Poe was sparked," and over the past seven years, the Los Angeles-based performer and Broadway veteran has reveled in the author's coolness on hundreds of occasions with his one-man touring presentation *In the Shadow of the Raven*.

Hudson will present this 50-minute production at the Moline Public Library on November 5, in an evening that includes dramatic interpretations of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and, yes, "The Raven." But in his role *as* Poe, Hudson also delivers an informative theatrical autobiography, providing understanding of and empathy for a man the show's creator calls "an amazing human

being in just really, really sad circumstances. He was just plagued by loss. Loss and rejection."

As Hudson demonstrates in *In the Shadow of the Raven,* the American writer's brief, troubled life was echoed in his acclaimed fiction, with Poe - much like characters in his haunting poetry and short stories - enduring the pain of childhood neglect and the traumatizing deaths of many loved ones, among them many beautiful women. And when you add Poe's suffering at the hands of foster father John Allan, his struggles for professional credibility, his discharge from the Army, his bouts with alcoholism and disease, and his mysterious death at age 40, Hudson says that the author's history - combined with his lasting literary accomplishments - makes him a most compelling figure for audiences.

"It's not that people who have well-adjusted lives aren't interesting," says Hudson during a recent interview. "It's that the expression of a well-adjusted life doesn't titillate us as much as the expression of a tormented life. It's that torture that we're attracted to. And Poe was a man that had a very direct, a very clear pipeline to who he was. He had a way to connect, *deeply*, to his sorrow, to those feelings of abandonment, and to express them eloquently."

To hear Hudson tell it, the road to writing and performing *In the Shadow of the Raven* was as unusual as one of Edgar Allan Poe's own stories - specifically "The Tell-Tale Heart," in which the sound of a murder victim's still-beating heart incessantly taunts Poe's protagonist. Happily for Hudson, though,
his
taunting was far less macabre.

"I was approached by an organization that books performances," he says, "and for whatever reason - I got on a mailing list or something - they assumed that I had a one-man show, and they sent me an offer to book me throughout several states. And I was like, 'Wow, that's interesting,' but I threw the offer away, because I thought, 'Well, I don't *have* a one-person show.'"

The missive, however, "landed in the trashcan face up, and every time I walked past the kitchen, it was just *looking* at me.

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