

'Evil Dead' musical bloody good

By JIM SLOTEK -- Sun Media



Who knows? Somewhere in his Spider-Man world of nine-figure budgets, suits and focus groups, Sam Raimi might be wistful for his days of giddy, over-the-top low-budget craziness. I know I am.

Fortunately for us, there's Evil Dead: The Musical, the deliriously-silly tribute/spoof of Raimi's seminal, hyperactive demons-in-the-woods horror films.

Born as a workshop production in the Tranzac Club in 2003, Evil Dead: The Musical went on to become the talk of New York. And it's returned to town for a stint at the Diesel Playhouse, complete with its own Rocky Horror-esque pedigree and an argot of audience-pleasing catchphrases — stuff like “It's time to kick some demon ass!”, “Good... bad... I'm the one with the gun!” and “This is my boomstick!”



Ryan Ward and Tara Macri co-star in the stage spoof Evil Dead: The Musical.

That's not to mention demon-possessed talking mooseheads and stuffed beavers, and blood spurting over the first three rows of the audience from chainsawed demon heads, shotgunned chests and even the very walls of the cabin from where the demons of Canderia have been called forth.

It's there, in what's been dubbed the “Splatter Zone,” that true fans can be found. Many of them at Tuesday's opener eschewed the plastic ponchos on offer, preferring to go home with (washable) souvenir bloodstains on their clothes.

It's not every campy spoof that manages to hit all the right notes, but writer George Reinblatt walks the line between mockery and affection, distilling plotpoints from both Evil Dead 1 & 2 and referencing the third, throwing in the odd “fourth wall” aside about plot holes and inconsistencies, and generally giving it the fanboy shakedown. Couple a lot of scary imagery with a bouncy score (by Reinblatt, Frank Cipolla, Melissa Morris and director Christopher Bond) that's as much Grease as Rocky Horror, and you have that delicious alchemy by which horror is transmuted into hysterical laughter.

The centerpiece of Evil Dead, of course, is department-store-stacker turned-demonkiller Ash, played in the movies by Bruce Campbell and played onstage since the beginning by virtual doppelganger Ryan Ward. By now Ward has most of Campbell's quirky mannerisms down, particularly the edge-of-hysteria power-laugh, reserved for mowing down demon-possessed friends and for bearing the taunts and infernally bad puns of his also-possessed sister Cheryl (Rachel Fischer).

Compared to Act 2, the first act is an almost bloodless affair (though it does feature the infamous “possessed hand/chainsaw scene”). It's devoted mainly to introducing our doomed students, who've hit upon the idea of breaking into a cabin in which to spend Spring Break. There's Ash, his girlfriend Linda (Tara Macri), his sister, his horndog sexist-pig friend Scott (Matt Olmstead) and Scott's bimbo girlfriend Shelly (Sarah Cornell in one of two key roles she plays).

Soon after the break-in, they run across a tape recording left by the professor who owns the place, a helpfully-phonetic translation of incantations from the Necronomicon that starts the ball rolling. One by one, the cast gets its moment to sing the possession song Look Who's Evil Now, which culminates in the Act 2 showstopper Do The Necronomicon. Soon, the

students-turned-demons are joined by the professor's daughter (Cornell again), her nebbish boyfriend (Christian Bellsmith, in a role so calculatedly disposable, he gets to sing the song Bit-Part Demon) and a scene-stealing local hick (Mike "Nug" Nahrgang).

Best number of the night: Cornell's rendition of the mouthful All the Men In My Life Keep Getting Killed By Canderian Demons. It was also the clearest in an opening night somewhat marred by uneven sound.

Evil Dead: The Musical is a fairly profane affair (as you might expect from a show with a song called What The F---?), so add that to the list of caveats, along with the possibility of getting blood splattered all over your nice, clean shirt.

Clearly demon-killing is not for the squeamish.

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