Music and Mayhem, Blood Trail Included

By ANITA GATES
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"Evil Dead: The Musical" wants to be the next "Rocky Horror Show," and it just may succeed.

Some people might think that you'd need to have seen at least one of Sam Raimi's "Evil Dead" movies to appreciate this show. But not necessarily. Horror comedy is, to say the least, a highly accessible genre, even for those who don't recognize and cheer the signature lines taken from the movies.

Sure, the show is idiotic, but that's the point.

Like the original 1983 film, so gory that it was rated NC-17, the musical is about five hormonal college students borrowing a cabin in the woods for a short vacation. They discover a 13th-century book of the dead, accidentally play an audiotape of demon-summoning words and are soon being possessed, one at a time, by evil forces.

This requires Ash (Ryan Ward, in the Bruce Campbell role) to fight back with a nearby chain saw. He even has to decapitate his girlfriend, Linda (Jennifer Byrne), with whom he has just sung the romantic duet "Housewares Employee."

The show, which basks in the self-referential, throws in characters and events from "Evil Dead II" (1987) and dismisses the second sequel ("Army of Darkness," 1992), which sent Ash time-traveling to the Middle Ages, with a passing remark.

The deadpan lyrics are by George Reinblatt, the playful choreography by Hinton Battle, who was co-director with Christopher Bond, and the lively music was composed by Mr. Reinblatt, Mr. Bond, Frank Cipolla and Melissa Morris.

Their most rousing number, "Do the Necronomicon," cheerfully evokes "The Time Warp" from "Rocky Horror." But the musical high point is Annie Knowby's doo-wop ballad "All the Men in My Life Keep Getting Killed by Candarian Demons." (Annie, the scientist's-beautiful-daughter character, is played by Renée Klapmeyer.)

Truly devoted cultists may want to sit in the splatter section, the first three rows. Those seats are covered in clear plastic, and the audience may want to be too, although apparently half the fun is to wear a clean white T-shirt and spend the next two hours being sprayed with geysers of stage blood.

“Evil Dead: The Musical” is at New World Stages, 340 West 50th Street, Clinton, (212) 239-6200.