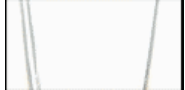


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STC's 'Evil Dead: The Musical' a bloody good time Featured

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(photo courtesy Some Theatre Company)

ORONO - Thanks to one Orono theatre company, the dead are rising ... and singing ... and dancing.

Some Theatre Company's production of "Evil Dead: The Musical" - with book and lyrics by George Reinblatt and music by Reinblatt, Frank Cipolla, Christopher Bond and Melissa Morris - is running at the Keith Anderson House in Orono through Nov. 9; the show is directed by Elaine Bard, with musical direction by Jason Wilkes.

It's based on the Sam Raimi movie series of the same name, a beloved cult favorite that starred Bruce Campbell as an out-of-his-depth guy who winds up thrust into an apocalyptic fight between good and evil that he is not even remotely prepared for. It is gory and visceral while also being winkingly self-aware and wildly funny. And as of 2003 - it's a musical.

And in the capable hands of the folks at STC, it is a hell of a lot of fun.

Ash (Logan Bard) is on vacation. He's brought along a few friends to join him on this adventure - his co-worker/girlfriend Linda (Dannin Scher), his sister Cheryl (Christy Bruton), his best friend Scott (Paul Allen) and Shelly (Corissa Bither), the chick that Scott picked up in a bar two days ago. They're all headed to an isolated cabin in the woods where they can get away from it all and enjoy the substance abuse and promiscuity we've come to expect from these sorts of stories.

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But it soon becomes clear that there's a lot more going on in this cabin than meets the eye. When they play the tape on an old tape recorder, they hear from Professor Knowby (Shayne Bither), a noted archaeological type who, in the course of translating the text of the Necronomicon, has unwittingly unleashed an unspeakable evil on the world.

The panicked friends begin to drop one by one, consumed by the sinister power of the demonic forces massing in and around the cabin. Before long, the only remaining option is to try to fight back. But how? Everyone is dead or possessed or both.

And it only gets MORE complicated when Professor Knowby's daughter Annie (Stacy Laflin) and her boyfriend Ed (Brandon Clark) enter the picture - not to mention the gregariously coarse and foulmouthed hillbilly Jake (Jake Sherburne).

It's up to Ash to save the day. The only problem is that he almost certainly can't do it.

The first thing you need to know about "Evil Dead: The Musical" is that there's a splash zone (technically two - a "Soak" and a "Splatter"). You might ask yourself "Really, how much splashing is going to happen?" Allow me to answer: a lot. Like, A LOT. Take however much splashing you THINK is a lot and increase it by a factor of 10. There are literal buckets of fake blood flying hither and yon, both when you expect it and when you don't. Now, you needn't worry - it'll wash off your skin and it's non-toxic. That said, I wouldn't wear white.

That interactivity goes beyond just buckets, too. There's little concern for the conventions of the fourth wall here - the cast can and occasionally does address the audience both directly and indirectly, even interacting to an extent. And even when the show acts more like a traditional musical, it remains far from traditional.

"Evil Dead: The Musical" is unabashedly crude and unapologetically goofy. Curse words abound and sexual innuendo is prevalent, as are groan-worthy puns and dated pop culture jokes.

And then there are the songs. Oh, the songs. From the love duet about falling in love at work ("Housewares Employee") to the "Time Warp" parody ("Do the Necronomicon"), from the doo-wop lover's lament ("All the Men in My Life Keep Getting Killed by Candarian Demons") to the dudebro shared disbelief at the situation ("What the F*** was That?") - the songs are ridiculous fun, packed with the same glorious grossness that marks the story itself; music director Wilkes has done good work here.

Bard - who is the artistic director of Some Theatre Company as well as the director of this production (also lighting, costume and props designer) - has long shown an affinity for attempting to push the envelope. Whether it's the show itself or just her own particular vision for it, Bard happily embraces the weird and/or macabre. So it's no surprise that a show like this one would appeal to her - it plays to her strengths, a fact made abundantly clear by what plays out on stage.

Mounting this show must be a logistical nightmare on the production side, yet STC manages to shine here as well. Gerry Bard's set design completely inverts the space, creating a whole new perspective on the room while also putting together an elaborate and shockingly flexible set (not to mention certain splash logistics).

As for the cast, well ... there's no denying that they're having fun up there. Logan Bard serves as a nicely square-jawed fill-in for Bruce Campbell, tackling the role with a spit-curl and a smirk. It's a tough part - he's the one who not only carries the narrative load, but also delivers most of the iconic lines - and he acquits himself well. The rest of the friend crew does well in bringing engaging qualities to flatly-conceived characters; the heavy d-bag energy of Allen's Scott, the slurring sluttiness of Corissa Bither's Shelly, the gee-whiz glow of Scher's Linda, the distinct and divided identities put forth by Bruton's Cheryl - it all works.

Shayne Bither is a smug delight as the Professor, while also serving as a coarsely charming MC of sorts over the course of the evening. The fouler his mouth, the funnier he gets - and his mouth gets FOUL. Sherburne is a treat as Jake the redneck plot device; he absolutely steals a couple of scenes with a fearless commitment to going big and broad. Laflin and Clark have their moments to shine as well, particularly in the back-to-back "Bit Part Demon"/"All the Men in My Life Keep Getting Killed by Candarian Demons." Quinn Bard and Negina Lowe have some ensemble fun as well.

"Evil Dead: The Musical" is another perfect example of the quality of work done by Some Theatre Company. This is a group that knows what it likes - and how to do it well. If you're a fan of the films - or just in the mood for some goofy songs and some gory-as-hell production numbers - you really ought to make the trip.

And if you're in the splash zone, get the poncho. Trust me.

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