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Footloose

by William Coyle

A Devil Inside reviewed June 29, 2008

“Zany.” “Madcap.”

Hackneyed as those words have become, they're nonetheless appropriate to describe David Lindsay-Abaire's 1997 play, *A Devil Inside*, which is something like *Curb Your Enthusiasm* meets *South Park*. The play is currently being presented by the fledgling but gifted Wide Eyed Productions Company.



Caitlin Boyd as Liz and Andrew Harriss as Carl
Photo Credit: Paul Newland

When a script is zany and madcap, even one from a playwright as contemporary and talented as Lindsay-Abaire, it runs the risk of wearing out its audience once they've gotten the joke. I'm glad to report that Wide Eyed Productions not only keeps the audience interested throughout the script's accrued silliness, but the actors appear to be having a genuinely good time doing so.

A Devil Inside is a dark comedy, ultimately pointless, yet fun, filled with characters who make the term “dysfunctional” banal. The plot centers around Gene Slater (Sage Seals), a 21-year old skateboarder whose mother, after several attempts, finally cajoles him into “becoming a man” by avenging what she believes was the murder of his 416-pound father 14 years earlier in the Poconos. The father, having read that he could walk off several pounds per day, had decided to just keep walking until he reached his ideal weight. All that remains of him are his feet, which Mrs. Slater (Kristin Skye Hoffmann), an East Village laundromat owner, has dutifully preserved in a formaldehyde-filled jar.



Kristin Skye Hoffmann as Mrs. Slater and Sage Seals as Gene
Photo Credit: Paul Newland

The cluttered set maximizes the stage area by making itself an interesting jumble of functionality. The action jumps back and forth from the laundromat to an appliance repair shop, so one side of the set features washing machines and the other side is a workbench. The rest of the clever set features a projection screen (showing the inside of a subway car and a bar) for train and tavern scenes. Because, in addition to feet, devils and guns are prominent in the play, what little wall space is left of the set features sketches of devils and a man pointing a gun.

Among the cast standouts is Andrew Harriss as Carl Raymonds. Mr. Harriss reminds me of a particularly deranged Chris Elliott. Carl is a professor of Russian literature, obsessed with Dostoyevsky and with his wife, Lily (Lauren Bahlman), a rock climber whom Carl believes has perished in the Poconos. Lily, having lost a foot in the climb (yes, feet are a huge deal in this play), is actually hiding out in Brad Bradford's appliance repair shop in the East Village. Carl has coincidentally passed by the shop and has seen Brad, such a “dull” individual that Carl becomes compelled to kill him in Dostoyevskian fashion—that is, for no apparent reason. Carl doesn't recall that Brad was once a student of his or that Brad had a major crush on him.

A DEVIL INSIDE

Richmond Shepard Theatre

Category: Comedy
Written by: David Lindsay-Abaire
Directed by: Justin Ness
Produced by: Wide Eyed Productions
Opened: June 26, 2008
Closed: July 13, 2008
Running Time: 2 hours

Theater: Richmond Shepard Theatre
Address: 309 E. 26th Street
New York, NY 10010
[Yahoo! Maps Directions](#)

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BOX OFFICE

Tickets: \$18.00
\$15 for students and seniors

CREDITS

Written by: David Lindsay-Abaire
Directed by: Justin Ness
Produced by: Wide Eyed Productions
Artistic Director: Kristin Skye Hoffmann
Artistic Advisor: Lea McKenna-Garcia
Artistic Advisor: Justin Ness

Cast

Gene Slater as Sage Seals
Kristin Skye Hoffmann as Mrs. Slater
Jake Paque as Brad Bradford
Liz White as Caitlin Boyd
Andrew Harriss as Carl Raymonds
Lauren Bahlman as Lily Lilerton

Crew

Marketing Director: Liz White

Mr. Harriss commands the wacky role of the alcoholic Carl — preoccupied, ranting hysterically and, with a shrug of his shoulders or a grunt, dismissing the advances of the lovelorn Caitlin Boyd (Liz White), a current student who happens to be crushing on him. Harriss stomps around the small stage much like...well, like an insane professor. I actually averted my eyes when he looked my way, concerned that he might ask me a question.

Jake Paque is often hilarious as the brain-injured Brad, who has been whacked over the head by Gene's flying skateboard after a tragic accident that, as you have probably guessed, coincidentally involved most of the other characters. Brad believes that a devil from a piece of wallpaper has chewed its way through his eye.



Jake Paque as Brad
Photo Credit: Paul Newland

Ms. Hoffmann turns in a solid tongue-in-cheek performance as Mrs. Slater, who wears relics of her star-crossed family's catastrophes (among them, Gene's skateboard and her brother's torn baby blanket — the only thing that remained after he was eaten by dogs) on a sash. And Ms. White is thoroughly convincing as the young Caitlin, so hopelessly infatuated with Carl that she unscrupulously helps him attempt to kill Brad.

The plot of *A Devil Inside* contains more improbable coincidences and relationships than even Larry David could think up. It's a challenging play for director Justin Ness' New York debut, but he and a young cast of up-and-comers meet the challenge joyfully, embracing the play's ridiculousness and upping the ante. It's best to sit back, suspend your considerable disbelief, and simply let the actors entertain you, because that's what this troupe does best.



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