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A Devil Inside

by Melissa Cruz

For the period of time I've been a theatre writer for Sugarzine I have rarely written a perfectly glowing review. In fact, I can count only two times that I completely raved about a show.

The first was the Off-Broadway production of "In the Heights" which is now happily residing on Broadway and boasts Tonys for Best Musical of 2008 and Best Original Score. Not that this has anything to do with my rave review. I'm just saying I'm picky...and I have good taste. The second time I gushed over a show was Wide Eyed Productions hilariously charming version of "Much Ado About Nothing." A show I wish I had a chance to see twice. Well, the renegade theater gypsies at Wide Eyed are back. This time at The Richmond Shepard Theatre with their interpretation of Pulitzer Prize winning playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's "A Devil Inside." I was excited and intrigued to see what they'd come up with next. I did not leave disappointed.



"A Devil Inside" is not for the faint of heart. It's a dark, surreal, violent, comedic tragedy...yes I said comedic tragedy...that is a challenge for both the audience and the players. It's a bold move for a company as young as Wide Eyed to attempt such a challenging script and in the hands of a less talented group could be disastrous. But fortunately we're not dealing with an amateur production. Wide Eyed understands the scripts challenges and the traps they could fall into resulting in a skillful, thoughtfully crafted and, most importantly, fun production. Lead by the direction of Justin Ness, our players give big, bold performances that can teeter on overacting but work perfectly for this style of script. They always remember to have a good time on stage allowing the comedy to shine, something that can very easily be lost by your usual self-indulgent theater company especially with text as complicated as this.

A highlight of the production is the intelligent and creative stage design. A portion of the action takes place in a lower east side laundromat, however scenes do bounce from a subway car to a lecture hall to a fix-it shop and even the inside of a van. We are transported seamlessly to these locations by clever use of video projection. While never taking away from the action on stage, a projection of the scenes setting accompanied by smart background audio adds an entirely new dimension. I applaud this creativity especially when dealing with a space as confining as the Richmond Shepard Theatre. The design crew has made wonderful use of a space that, again to a less talented group, could be a hindrance.

Wide Eyed Productions "A Devil Inside" could best be described as a brainy, hip acid trip. It's dark and surreal but not polarizing. It's funny and quirky but not a farce. Every so often one of our characters will take a moment to show us something real and relatable in the midst of calamity. This is what makes this production work. They've given their audience something tangible in a bizarre world and had a blast while doing so. Given this is only Wide Eyed's third production I predict more great things to come from this group. They are already a force to be reckoned with and will shortly be well known for producing some of the best and most daring theatre in

New York City.

"A Devil Inside" runs Thursday through Sunday until July 13th

Richmond Shepard Theatre
309 E. 26th Street (at 2nd Ave)
New York , NY

For tickets to visit: www.theatermania.com

For more info on Wide Eyed Productions visit www.myspace.com/wideyednyc or www.wideeyedproductions.com