



trodding the boards

by Brian Sands
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The Toxic Avenger, The Musical at The Theatre at St. Claude through Oct. 31

Just in time for Halloween, or perhaps the election from Hell, **See 'Em On Stage: A Production Company** is giving the regional premiere to **The Toxic Avenger, The Musical**. If you're looking for a treat, this is it.

Based on Lloyd Kaufman's shlocky but successful 1984 movie, **Toxic Avenger** tells the New Jersey-based tale of nerdy Melvin Ferd the Third who's in love with Sarah the beautiful blind librarian. When Melvin uncovers some dirt on the town's hypocritical Mayor Babs Belgoody, she sends her goons after him who plunk him in a barrel of toxic waste. Voila!—the nerd becomes an eco-protecting superhero who battles evildoers, occasionally ripping a hand or arm off of them. (Cue the squirting blood for the first row "Splatter Zone.")

Joe (**Memphis**) DiPietro's book delivers blissful campy fun, and while his and

David (**Bon Jovi**) Bryan's lyrics rarely rise above such fine poetry as "It's gonna be a blast/To kick your ass," they get the job done and move the story along. And, unlike many pop-rock musicals (including SEOS's previous effort, **Lizzie**), you can actually understand the words here, a credit to the cast and the band under Ronald Joseph's expert direction.

Bryan also did the music and if you're not likely to head out of the theater humming any of his tunes, they're peppy and just right for the knowingly ridiculous material.

Christopher Bentivegna's sure-handed

direction is efficient and imaginative never letting the momentum slack. His stylistically spot-on approach and attention to detail unleash all the show's hilarity. More importantly, he draws out recognizable human emotions from under the script's comic veneer without which this would be too silly for its own good. At **The Theatre at St. Claude**, we actually care about Melvin, Sarah, and what happens to them as we laugh at the terrible puns, dopey slapstick, and **Mad Magazine** humor.

Bentivegna rims the stage with black plastic garbage bags, quite apropos for a musical inspired by waste. Following its introduction in **Lizzie**, his use of aerosol-induced smoke/fog seems like it might become de rigueur for SEOS productions, but who cares when it's such a cool effect.

The extremely talented cast of five, all in sync with the **Avenger's** requisite gooney style, features two breakout performances.

As Sarah, Elyse McDaniel is absolutely delicious as the wannabe novelist described as "Mother Theresa if she was blind and hot." I had admired McDaniel in SEOS' **Zanna, Don't!** and Delgado's **Bat Boy**, but here she reveals herself to be a daring comic actress enriching Sarah with a throaty voice and a bewitching cluelessness regarding her disability, never even hinting that it might get in her way. Tender yet tough, and displaying a marvelously powerful voice in her songs, McDaniel evokes a young Carol Burnett, only sexier.

Bringing sharp characterizations to a

Today Satan?

BDR: It is basically me bitching about all the things I hate and my experiences from being in the airport to being on television. I have tons of material to discuss. I find talking about these things and my time on Ru Paul to be liberating and cathartic.

TL: Tell me about *Hurricane Bianca*?

BDR: *Hurricane Bianca* was a labor of love of my friend Matt Kugelman who works for CBS. We were lucky to get so many celebrities like Margaret Cho, Rachel Dratch, RuPaul and Alan Cumming. It was Matt's vision and his magic who got these people. It never hurts to ask and see who would be willing to do it. We filmed two summers ago in Texas and we shot everything in 18 days. I was on my worldwide tour and when I had a break I would fly to Texas from Amsterdam. And since I am in almost every scene, especially in drag, that adds to the pressure to get things right the first time. So we were able to get most scenes in 2 or 3 takes. Now I watch it and wish maybe I would have done something different but you make choices quickly when you are in the moment.

TL: So where is home now?

BDR: I have lived in Los Angeles for almost a year now. I love New York, but with flights and delays, I was living most of my life in airports and busses, so it's just easier. They have great weather and it is just comfortable.

TL: What is on the horizon for Bianca?

BDR: I will be taking the show to London at the beginning of next year. Currently we have sold out two shows and are adding more. But you know I am always plotting and planning. I do have an exciting secret project I am working on that I will be able to announce before the holidays.

So that was a quick conversation with Roy the man behind Bianca del Rio. For more information on Bianca, go to www.thebiancadelrio.com. Tickets can be found on www.ticketmaster.com.



variety of parts—dimwitted thug, sassy homegirl, a scientist in sexual thrall to the evil mayor, and many more—Tulane senior Luke Halpern proves to be a vital team member smartly calibrating his quick changes to find just the proper temperament for each of his roles. Halpern's sly Mitch in Rivertown's **25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee** didn't prepare me for his outstanding work in **Avenger** and I look forward to his future appearances.

The other three, better known **Avengers** match McDaniel and Halpern's well-polished turns.

Without having the benefit of using his face, as it's encased in a frighteningly ugly full-head mask for most of the show, Kevin Murphy still gives a fully expressive performance as Melvin, aka The Toxic Avenger, aptly conveying "Toxie's" conflicted emotions. Murphy's soulfulness allows us to cheer as Melvin blossoms not only into a romantic lead, but the Governor of New Jersey as well, certainly an improvement on the current one.

As the corrupt Mayor who aspires to Chris Christie-hood, two-time Ambie-nominee Janie Heck's prodigious vocal and comic gifts shine especially when, doubling as Melvin's bossy mother, she has a snarling duet with the Mayor, running offstage for lightning-fast costume changes until, in a final tour de force, she merely pivots back and forth, delineating each character fantastically.

Eli Timm completes the cast as "White Dude" wonderfully portraying a demure young lesbian, a knuckleheaded cop, a flighty hairdresser and many more. Timm and Halpern ("Black Dude") may be just two actors but they populate the stage with what seems like hundreds, or at least dozens, of characters. Along with their castmates, they do full justice to Kali Russell's MTV video-inspired choreography.

With five upcoming performances this weekend, including October 31, **The Toxic Avenger** is a bootiful way to spend Halloween.

Pictures of Marilyn at The National WWII Museum's Stage Door Canteen thru Nov. 27

Courtney Boe seems born to play Marilyn Monroe. With her petite figure, open face, pretty yet wholesome mien and platinum blonde hair, not to mention knock-out singing, dancing, and acting talents, casting her as the most famously alluring woman of the 20th century is a no-brainer.

I have always admired Boe from her early days with the **Victory Belles** to featured roles in **On the Air, My Way: A Musical Tribute to Frank Sinatra** and **Thanks for the Memories: Bob Hope and His All-Star Pacific Tour** to her star turn in **The Andrews Brothers** which prompted me to write, "With her gorgeous voice, it's been a pleasure to watch her develop over the past few seasons from talented ensemble member to charismatic leading lady."

So when I heard she'd be playing the lead in **Pictures of Marilyn** I smiled looking forward to her performance.

She doesn't disappoint.

In **Pictures of Marilyn**, a new play with music, Boe is called upon to encapsulate Monroe's life from her days working in a

[continued on 37]

An Interview with Bianca Del Rio

Before Bianca won RuPaul's Drag Race Season, before *Hurricane Bianca*, before the world tours, he was our wonderfully talented actor, comic and costumer Roy Haylock here in NOLA. As long as I have known Roy, he has always been a witty, kind and generous person who exudes talent. And when he transforms into his popular persona Bianca del Rio, the barbs and the laughs start coming fast and furious.

It is always so incredible when someone from our city makes a positive international name for themselves. It is like the entire city rallies around them, that can be especially said about the wonderful Bianca del Rio. During Season 6, it felt like the entire New Orleans metropolitan gay com-



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spotlight feature

Mr. Louisiana Leather Ross Ransom Sets Haiti Fundraiser

On November 2nd, Mr. Louisiana Leather 2017 Ross Ransom, in collaboration with Miss Pageant, Neon Burgundy will be hosting Caribbean Cruising: a fundraiser to benefit those affected by the recent catastrophe in southern Haiti.

The event will be hosted by Cane and Table at 1113 Decatur St from 9pm until midnight. The fundraiser will include cocktail specials, a silent auction and raffle items from local artists, a special limited edition print from Kiernan Dunn, and performances from local drag artists Nicole Lynn Foxx and Neon Burgundy.

All proceeds from the event will be directed to local, on the ground charity organizations in Jeremie, Haiti.



Mr. Louisiana Leather 2017
Ross Ransom

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WWII factory as Norma Jeane Mortenson to the formation of Marilyn Monroe Productions in 1955.

It's clear that Boe has done her homework; she achieves an astonishing recreation of the actresses's poise and million-watt smile. She aptly captures Monroe's flightiness and her ability to manipulate men as well as the famed moment with the white dress from *The Seven Year Itch*. If she doesn't quite get Monroe's breathy etherealness, well, who could?

I just wish that Cavan Hallman's script had given her more to work with. Monroe was a complicated person whose life has already been probed and dissected on page, stage and screen. If you're going to examine it yet again, you ought to have something new and vital to say about it, or at least present it in a unusual or captivating format.

Hallman does none of these. Episodic in nature, *Pictures of Marilyn* chugs along giving us Monroe's relationships with Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller, her fights with studio boss Darryl Zanuck, and her business relationship with photographer Milton Greene, seemingly one of the few decent men in her life.

It's not a bad introduction to Monroe, but rarely rises above Marilyn 101.

Hallman interpolates songs throughout the show. Some (*Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend* and *I Wanna Be Loved By You*) appropriately come from Monroe's canon. Others (*Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe* and *They All Laughed*) fitly comment on the action. But some (*Jezebel* particularly) seem

strangely shoe-horned in with no real connection to Monroe.

In some passages, Hallman seems to want the show be a surreal take on Monroe's life, which could be interesting, but then he reverts to straightforward narrative.

Given the show's title and that Monroe was one of the most-photographed women



in the world, I thought that Hallman might use a series of her iconic images as jumping off points to tell her story but that never develops.

It's unfortunate that Hallman also directed since, as is often the case in such a situation, a separate pair of more objective eyes might've aided him in better shaping his story.

Aside from Boe, the seven-member cast do their best to bring to life Hallman's



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two-dimensional characters. Joe DiMaggio may have been little more than a traditionally macho man when he was first married to Monroe (apparently, a more mellow DiMaggio came back into her life later), but it allows Edward Simon limited room to interpret the Yankee great. Kevin Rothlisberger's Arthur Miller fares slightly better eliciting applause after one truly dramatic scene with Monroe.

Mike Spara comes off best as Greene, a happily married man who genuinely looked out for Monroe's interests. (Greene and Monroe later parted ways but that's another story.)

The National WWII Museum is to be commended for expanding its programming and working with local artists to develop new stage works. Though not perfect, you may want to see *Pictures of Marilyn* as it'll mark the final appearances of Courtney Boe there (she's now studying for a career in interior design). Courtney, we salute you!

The dinner that is being served by **The American Sector** before the show is also worthy of a salute. **Beet Salad** with nicely diced beets, arugula, bleu cheese, toasted almonds, and a tangy citrus vinaigrette dressing starts off the meal on a healthy and refreshing note.

Orange Glazed Salmon with cous cous, spinach and butternut squash was absolutely scrumptious, a lovely blending of flavors and textures. Make sure you hold on to some bread to sop up any leftover portion of the accompanying citrus gastrique.

I had only one yummy bite of the **Grilled Pork Loin** with roasted sweet potato, charred Brussels sprouts and spiced bacon jus, but my companion assured me that the entire dish was tender and tasty.

A delectable **Caramel Apple Cheese-cake** with candied pecans and cinnamon whipped cream completes the meal in fine fashion. Gentlemen may prefer blondes, but I prefer whatever The American Sector's new Executive Chef Brooke Foster is serving!

out front

Louisiana All Star: New Orleans Leads the Way in LGBTQ Equality

At a time when many states have failed to extend LGBTQ-inclusive laws and policies, New Orleans is stepping up to ensure that all citizens are treated equally, according to a report issued by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC), the educational arm of the nation's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) civil rights organization.

HRC's *2016 Municipal Equality Index (MEI)* shows that around the country cities are fueling momentum for LGBTQ equality — and often are doing so in states that still don't have LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination laws at the state level.

In Louisiana, New Orleans earned over 85 points on the 2016 MEI despite hailing from a state without LGBTQ-inclusive statewide non-discrimination laws. Across the country, 37 cities like these set a standard of LGBTQ inclusiveness with exemplary, best-practice policies such as local non-discrimination laws, providing transgender-inclusive health benefits for city employees, and offering LGBTQ-inclusive city services.

Shining like a beacon of hope, New Orleans earned one of HRC's 37 MEI "All Star" designations. MEI All Stars are cities nationwide that are excelling by advancing LGBTQ equality without relying on state law. This year, New Orleans earned 89 points. Louisville earned 91 points last year.

The average score for cities in Louisiana is 32 out of 100 points, which falls below the national average of 55.

The cities researched for the MEI include the 50 state capitals, the 200 most populous cities in the country, the five

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lez talk

by Misti Gaither
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Samiel Kalin

The majority of us enjoy a good story about someone who, against all odds, survives tragedy and defeat. It gives us hope that when we are in situations of hopelessness and despair, we can relate and become a survivor, too. I could elaborate on stories such as "The Unsinkable" Molly Brown and other survivors of disasters. But, I want to tell you about a story that is a little closer to home. I want to tell you about the inspiring story of a true survivor, my friend, Samiel Kalin.

Samuel Kalin is the author of the autobiographical book, "First Stone: A Gay Daughter's Survival in a Religious World". From the moment you read the first sentence, you are drawn into a world that is filled with pain, rejection, religion and self awareness. It is these ingredients that are the fodder that makes Samuel Kalin's life a testament to those who have struggled with rejection of family clouded by the deception of religion.

Sam's early years were filled with conflicting emotions for her father. A man of God who did good things for



many people, but at home he reigned with an iron fist. His display of goodness and godliness in public was tarnished in his daughter's mind as her mom and then Sam would become the recipients of physical, emotional and verbal abuse. Maybe because of some similarities in our backgrounds, Samuel and I connected on this level as kindred spirits.

Sam had always been attracted to females, but as she was raised in such a controlled environment, she had no idea that there was such a thing as lesbianism. Sam began her journey of

freedom and self expression when she left home after graduation and started to attend UNO. She was then able to meet like minded individuals who were quick to take her under their wings. It was at this time, she felt for the first time that she finally belonged. Sam became acquainted fast with the French Quarter and the night life that envelopes so many of us with its lure and charm. It was there she met and became friends with different fixtures of our history such as, Necha Benoit "Lady Magic", Charlene Schneider and more.

The story of Samuel Kalin doesn't end nor begin in the bars of the Quarter. She eventually moved to Dallas and became one of the pioneers in the fight against AIDS through her work at the AIDS Resource Center. It was there she saw first hand and up close the devastation the AIDS epidemic had on the LGBT community. And just as she had always done before, whenever there was someone in need, Sam stepped up and did what needed to be done.

Even though she had a new life in Dallas, Sam could not get New Orleans out of her mind. She would occasionally visit to see old friends and would sneak home to see her mom whose health was fading. This tug of war with Sam's heartstrings went on for years, until recently Sam decided she wanted to be back in New Orleans and make it her home once again. She is currently working on her second book which will continue where "First Stone" ended. There is so much I could write about concerning Samuel's journey and progress in her life. I suggest you read "First Stone" so that you will learn first hand, what a fighter and survivor she is. To purchase "First Stone", contact Samuel at samielkalin@yahoo.com.

The saying, "you can't go home again" has resonated through out time as an old wives' tale that has truth somewhat intertwined. Home is not

19th-century through Nov. 5. Tours are offered weekdays (closed Wednesdays) at 10 and 11am, noon, 1 and 2pm; and Saturdays (closed Sundays) at noon, 1, 2 and 3pm.

Grief descended upon the Gallier household in October 1866, when news arrived that patriarch James Gallier, Sr., and his second wife drowned at sea aboard the S.S. Evening Star. The passenger steamship, destined for New Orleans from New York, sank in a late-season hurricane off the coast of Georgia.

The Gallier Historic House Museum will be in mourning as they commemorate the death of the senior Galliers. During the Victorian era, almost every aspect of everyday life, from clothes to china, were changed to reflect the family's grief. The front entry of the home was swathed in black crepe, as were mirrors and the deceased's portrait. Clocks were stopped at the hour of death, and even children's toys reflected the solemn mood. Displays of distinctive funeral attire and many Victorian mourning articles will provide visitors to the Gallier House

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just a physical place made out of bricks or wood, but a feeling or a realization that it is a place where you belong and/or are welcomed.

Welcome Home, Samuel Kalin.. it's good to have you back!

out front ...from 37

largest cities in every state, the cities home to each state's two largest public universities, and an equal mix of 75 of the nation's large, mid-size and small municipalities with the highest proportion of same-sex couples.

"This year, dozens of cities across the nation showed they are willing to stand up for LGBTQ people in their communities even when some state governments are not," said HRC President Chad Griffin. "This builds on a trend we have long observed: that local governments are at the forefront of our fight for equality. Unfortunately, our opponents have witnessed this progress too, and in recent years, anti-LGBTQ lawmakers have pushed spiteful legislation aimed at pre-empting local protections. That's why it's so important that we continue to not only fight for equality at the state and local levels, but to enact comprehensive federal protections for LGBTQ people under the Equality Act."

"Despite another year of legislative attacks on LGBTQ equality, we are not merely holding our ground; we also continue to make significant gains across the country," said Rebecca Isaacs, Executive Director of the Equality Federation Institute. "The opportunity for further progress is huge, and we are proud to partner with HRC on the Municipal Equality Index, a powerful roadmap for elected officials and community advocates who want to continue down the path to full equality."

Since the MEI's debut in 2012, the number of cities earning perfect scores has more than quintupled, and today at least 24 million people now live in cities that have

more comprehensive, transgender-inclusive non-discrimination laws than their state or the federal government. And cities that have been rated all five years of the MEI have improved their scores by about 20 points over that time.

Progress on transgender equality has been particularly noteworthy in cities across America this year, continuing a positive trend that the MEI has tracked — and encouraged — since 2012. Transgender-inclusive healthcare benefits are offered to employees of 86 municipalities this year — up from 66 in 2015 and 5 in 2012 — and the growth of cities offering those benefits to their employees outpaces the growth in the number of cities rated.

For the first time this year, the MEI deducted points from the scores of cities that have non-discrimination protections containing carve-outs prohibiting individuals from using public facilities consistent with their gender identity. It also created a new category of points to recognize cities that are offering transgender-specific city services.

The full report, including detailed scorecards for every city, as well as a searchable database, is available online at www.hrc.org/mei.home, at work and in every community.

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