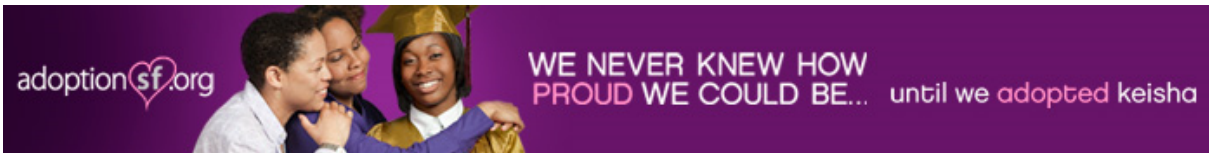


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For the week of July 30, 2009 Last updated on August 03, 2009 10:17 PM PT



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An Urban Rock Musical at The Boxcar

Published: July 30, 2009

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By Carol Dunne

They say that an existentialist attitude is an awareness of the absurdity of reality. If so, then Skid Row and its runaway teens are the quintessential existentialists...



The Rent Boy Ave. opening night gala party, with actors actresses, playwright, composer, director and crew. Below: Bobby Bryce, who started out as an innocent and ended up dominating Donald Currie, who sought to exploit him. Photo by Rink.

The musical starts when innocent David (played by the sweet voiced Bobby Bryce), fresh off the bus from Kansas, finds himself on Skid Row, broke with nowhere to go.

We witness David reluctantly enter "the life" as he is forced by his circumstances into acts of desperation. Despite their sordid profession and the source of their income, these young souls remain untainted...

The villain is the pimp/drug dealer (Anthony Rollins-Mullens). Rollins-Mullens is spectacular with his honey-laden voice as he menacingly glides across the floor rhyming his tantalizing web over Jackie.

You enter a sordid atmosphere when you walk into the Boxcar theatre. You walk in off the street in the midst of Skid Row on 6 and Natoma amidst the real homeless, alcoholics, drug dealers, hustlers and addicts.

performance. There are hustlers prowling the floor, drug deals going down, spooky dark corners with people in rags lying around, all surrounded by an intimidating barbed wire fence and graffiti covered walls. You will be panhandled, hustled, and given condoms by the good Samaritan, Sister Mercy, played by Michelle Ianiro whose singing voice is deep and resonant. She is the voice of experience, the tough nun who's been there, done it and seen it all. The turning point comes when Mark is brutally beaten by the Dirty Old Man, creepily played by Nick Olivero. Sister Mercy rescues Mark when she gives him a one-way ticket out of Skid Row and tells him to "get out." Mark recovers his fragile sense of hope, even amidst these dire circumstances and we watch him leave without Jackie. Our hearts ache for her as she makes excuses to Mark about staying in Skid Row because "she likes it there."

The fact that this is a musical tempers the harshness of the themes of prostitution and addiction, otherwise it would be too painful to watch these young people being sexually and physically abused and manipulated. This is confrontational and interactive theatre, edgy, provocative, delving into our shadows and confronting us with our own hypocrisy. Who are the real whores in society? Is it really these abused teens? Are they innocent victims or hardened young criminals? Bravo to Boxcar Theatre Productions for helping us face our collective fears and for looking at the problem of addiction and prostitution in such a raw and painful fashion. Only by confronting our demons, facing our dark sides and the ugly truth, can we set about fixing it. This musical is not for the faint of heart, lots of profanity, sex scenes, violence and drug use.

Rent Boy Ave. A Fairy's Tale plays through Aug. 8 at the Boxcar Theatre at 505 Natoma Street, San Francisco. Tickets are only \$12 if you book now.

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