



Staten Island Advance website — February 24, 2018

‘Bloody’ political action takes flight on Wagner College stage

by VICTORIA PRIOLA

Wagner College Theatre is getting in on the political action — with high-flying stunts and history lessons in the form of song. (Yeah, “Hamilton” was not there first, folks.)

“Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson,” a satirical twist on American history paired with rock opera show tunes, takes to the Main Stage through March 4 on the Grymes Hill campus.

And yes, this is showbiz, so anything is possible: Wagner College thespian Eric Elson is zip-lining above the audience during the show’s anthemic “Rock Star.” (Check out his over-the-audience stunt skills in the video below.)

The acclaimed musical — making waves on and off Broadway since 2008 — is a rocking taking on Andrew Jackson’s life as the seventh President of the United States.

If this sounds like a knock-off of another highly successful Broadway play, think again. Those who know this show best go so far as to say: “Without ‘Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson,’ there would be no ‘Hamilton.’”

The tagline of this show? “History just got all sexy-pants.”

James Barry — who has been loyal to this show since 2009, appearing in the on and off-Broadway productions — directs the WCT production.

“The play works in a different context in this American moment than it did when [Barack] Obama was President,” Barry says. “We’ve seen so much populism in the last election cycle, whether it was the populism of Trump or Bernie Sanders. The word is on everyone’s tongue again.”

Ironically, the show opens up with a number titled “Populism, Yeah Yeah.”

“[This show] is relevant in a whole new cultural sense, right now,” Barry says.

He says the show — no matter which side of the aisle you reside — is enjoyable to all — unless you are under the age of 17. (Yeah, there’s an MF or two in there, so the content isn’t suitable for young ones.)

Sure, all of this might sound historical and heavy — but the songs are upbeat and the cast is energetic. The show itself is intensely interactive, with cast members racing down the aisles at various parts of the show to dance and sing.

“Above all else, I just feel so lucky to have a job directing here,” Barry adds. “It’s an amazing theatre department. Quite frankly, I would’ve directed any show here. I’m happy I have a personal history with this one in particular, though.”

ERIC ELSON ON BECOMING ‘JACKSON’

Elson, a Wagner College senior pursuing a major in Theatre Performance, says the moment he was cast as Andrew Jackson, he picked up as many books on American history as he could find.

“The parody that we go along with here — of the emo-rock lifestyle — was something I’m familiar with,” Elson says. “The real work had to be done through getting to know the man [Andrew Jackson] was.”

Getting on stage to belt out the score was a breeze, Elson says, being that he is in his own rock band. And, yes, his nails were painted black and he worked some serious black eyeliner.

When asked if he was nervous about soaring above the audience, Elson says he left his nerves backstage: “We’ve done it so many times by now. It’s just like, ‘I’m ready!’”

IF YOU GO TO THE SHOW ...

Performances of “Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson” take place in the Main Hall Auditorium of Wagner College, located at 1 Campus Road in Grymes Hill. Fifty Wagner College students are participating in making this show happen, two weekends in a row.

Curtains: Up through March 4. Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m., with matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. (There is no performance Sunday, Feb. 25.)

Single ticket prices are as follows: Thursday evenings \$25-\$29, Fridays, Saturdays, and matinees \$28-\$32. Prices range for children, senior and adult tickets. Wagner College students attend free with current ID.

For more information, call the Wagner College Theatre box office at 718-390-3259; Monday through Friday, noon to 4 p.m.

Here’s the cast: Eric Elson (Andrew Jackson), Savannah Beckford (Rachel Jackson), Julia Adams (Storyteller), Gary Lumpkin (Martin Van Buren), Nick Manna (John C. Calhoun), Zachary Norris (Henry Clay), DeVonte McCray (James Monroe), Sammy Quinn (John Quincy Adams), Gabriel Trimbur (Black Fox), Danielle Allen (Lyncoya), Audrey Robinson (Announcer), Brianna Brice (Elizabeth), Albert Nelthropp (Andrew Jackson, Sr.), Conner Wynn (Cobbler), Michael Luszczak (Red Eagle), Cassandra Dougherty (10 Little Indians), Joe

Cowdrey (Keokuk), Kellen Gaughan (Rock Star), Emily Morris (Second Nature). Gianina Mugavero and Gino Cardoni are co-dance captains and female/male covers.

The production team includes James Barry (Director), Carl Haan (Music Director), Ashley DeLane Burger (Choreographer), Richard and Polly Kendrick (Scenic and Costume Design), Vicki Neal (Lighting Design), Richard Kroth (Sound Design), Phill Hickox (Production Manager), Brian T. Sharron (Technical Director), Jacob Grigolia-Rosenbaum (Fight Director), and Nick Durst (Production Stage Manager).