

'Coming Attractions' to hit UTA's Mainstage

Satire explores social issues with music, mock pop icons

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By Steve Freeman / Special Contributor to the Arlington Morning News

When an innocent passer-by gets murdered, the word "Ouch" pops up above him.

The scene, more like a frame in an adult comic book, is part of a drama that looks at life in the self-indulgent 1980s through the theater of the absurd. That's where a Laundromat robbery can lead to celebrity status for a two-bit criminal with the help of some marketing know-how.

From a distance, the University of Texas at Arlington's production of *Coming Attractions* looks like a collage of modern angst. But close up, the play, opening Thursday, is a twisted journey into the MTV generation where radical individualism abuses and gets abused by a society out of control.

The satire for mature audiences is a social commentary on the power of the media over people with weak minds, according to director Joe Chapa. The deceptions that surface in the story of Lonnie Wayne Burke accompanies scenes of violence, manipulation and self-glorification - themes that Mr. Chapa claims he portrays farcically.



Brad Loper / AMN

"This is a combination of the Marx Brothers and Quentin Tarantino,"

says Mr. Chapa, associate theater professor. "You're laughing one minute and saying 'Hey, that's not funny' the next - but it's challenging and makes you think about society."

To help audiences make the connection between feelings and society's messages, UTA's production adds enough music to fill a radio time slot. Recordings of 1980s pop artists stream through the theater and an occasional music video frames the absurd goings-on among characters in the 18-person cast.

The sounds of The Pretenders, Huey Lewis and The News, Culture Club, Madonna and Bobby McFerrin, among others, help blur the lines between reality and society's irrationality. Mr. Chapa has added mock impersonations of five pop icons - Billy Idol, Madonna, Boy George, Michael Jackson and Cyndi Lauper - to assure the experience.

It all occurs on a stage segmented like a three-ring circus, another metaphor to the exploitative showmanship evident in the public arena.

Coming Attractions by Ted Tally follows the doomed partnership of Manny Alter and Lonnie Wayne Burke. Manny, played by Brian Lunde of Dallas, is a down-and-out theatrical agent whose clients include dogs not quite ready to perform prime-time stupid pet tricks. Then he meets Lonnie Wayne, played by Chad Rae of Lancaster.

Lonnie Wayne is a criminal who has talent and a warped desire to be infamous, but no schtick. His creative robbery of a self-service laundry fails to satisfy and puts him on a path for greater thrills and chills.

With Manny's help, Lonnie Wayne takes his petty crimes to a new level - hostage situations and murder. Effective marketing pays off and the latest serial killer in the headlines becomes a media darling known as "The Halloween Killer."

Mr. Rae says he struggled to find Lonnie's personality, but believes he had arrived when he realized the guy was as much as victim at the hands of Manny as he was a villain. He plays the character as if he's a mentally slow individual who has only known a life of petty crime and has been in and out of jail most of his life.

"It's hard playing a psychotic killer and making him human and even likable, but playing him slow was the key," Mr. Rae says.

Lonnie Wayne's killing spree claims 28 victims. He dons a childlike costume of a skeleton and yells, "Trick or treat, you bourgeois pig," as if knowing the statement will land in the newspapers.

Mr. Rae calls the murderous rampage entertaining, especially since the images let audiences know the actions are a parody of pop culture.

Lonnie Wayne's time in the spotlight is brief, however, as his fame and money bring his downfall. And the media moves on to cover tomorrow's news.

"This is a 'Me' generation story at its finest because in the end, no one's

paying attention," Mr. Chapa says.

The ensemble cast features detectives, cops, victims and Miss America contestants. Players include Dan Evers, Dixie Fields, Clay Jackson, Mike Rafferty, Sarah Tipton, Monica Henry, Sara Holder, Andy Reynolds, Ron McCrainie, Summer Rosales, Keith Blount, Matt Ducey, Jessica Landeros, Alicia Moore, Matt Morrison and Mike Murray.

Coming Attractions

WHEN: 8 p.m. Thursday through Nov. 18 and 2:30 p.m. Nov. 19

WHERE: The Mainstage, Fine Arts Building, 502 S. Cooper St. on the University of Texas at Arlington campus

COST: \$6 for adults, \$3 for students

INFORMATION: Call 817-272-2669