



Ratz

Playwright: Peter Turrini

Translated by Sandhano Schultze and cast

Director: Sandhano Schultze

Starring: Pat Bermel and Helen Denhaan

A review from our archives...

WELCOME TO MY HELL-HOLE

TOM HAWTHORNE meets the actor who stares despair in the face in the play Ratz

RATS stare from the black void that is Pat Bermel's private little hell. The hell is a pit of busted toilets, old tires, litter, a car cannibalized for parts. The slick red neon of a Rainier beer sign shines sickly off drab walls. It is a home of loathing and self-hatred. He blasts the rats with a long-barrelled revolver.

"Living off another creature's death is the only kick he can get," says actor Bermel of his role as the male half of an unnamed couple in the play Ratz. "That has been the extent of his emotionality." The rats he blasts are the audience.

This play about a mucho macho dude and a passive tomato (Helen Denhaan) has been translated from German by the cast and crew, who have added Bruce Springsteen songs as a modern flourish to a work written by Austrian-born author Peter Turrini in 1967.

An ancient brick warehouse at 102 Powell St. in Gastown has temporarily been converted for the play's first run in Canada. "We're looking for an audience," Bermel admits. "When they did this play in Berlin they found their audience right away. We've been getting small audiences, but there has always been a certain percentage of people look-ing for that experience, ready to handle that experience."

Production and direction are by Sandhano, who founded a Berlin theatre company in 1979 when he was 20. Having had success with Ratz there, Bermel says, Sandhano wanted to press its passion on a Canadian audience. The notion is to confront passivity with screaming harangues delivered squarely at the audience. The characters peel away their societal trappings - family photos, clothes - in a desperate effort to become familiar. Says Bermel: "This character is angry. I have to find that part in myself, that frustration, that anger, that disillusionment. He's very masculine, he's very violent, and he's very passionate. It gives me absolute permission to be a complete animal. A passionate animal. And one who can change, who can find hope and fall in love and go crazy."

Performances at 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays until July 5.

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