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HOLLYWOOD FRINGE REVIEWS: DYSTOPIAN MUSICALS 'THUG TUNNEL' AND 'THE TOXIC AVENGER MUSICAL'

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The Toxic Avenger Musical

Good People Theatre Company
Fringe Premiere

The Toxic Avenger is a cultural phenomenon that will never die – whether you like it or not. Since his 1984 debut in Troma's low-budget comedy feature, the character of Toxie has lived on through three sequels, a whole bunch of product marketing and an off-Broadway musical to achieve his arguably iconic status.

This year, the musical makes its Fringe debut in a no-frills production that relies on solid performances and musicianship to put it over. Anyone

who's seen the show knows the drill: Nerdy Melvin Ferd the Third (Jared Reed) is upset that his beloved town of Tromaville, New Jersey, is being used as a toxic waste dump, and turns to the crooked Mayor Belgoody (Shirley Anne Hatton) for help, only to discover that she's in on the plot. Determined to put a stop to the pollution, he tells blind librarian Sarah (Kim Dalton), the girl he loves, about his plans. But before he can put a stop to it all, the mayor's thugs (Danny Fetter and Wesley Tunison) seize him and toss him into a vat of nuclear waste, which imbues him with super powers and transforms him into...*the Toxic Avenger!*

Good People's production at the Fringe revels in its low-budget splendor. Reed does double duty as Melvin and Toxie, and the change in his voice and character after he's mutated is impressive. In addition to portraying the crooked mayor, Hatton also portrays Melvin's nagging mother (and a nun). In contrast, Kim Dalton has a relatively simple role as sweet Sarah – except she's got to play it blind! Fetter and Tunison portray the lion's share of characters, morphing into cops, criminals, hairdressers and whatever else is called for over the course of the show.

The quick changes here are nothing short of extraordinary as the performers duck backstage for what seems like just a few seconds, only to emerge in completely different guises. During one number, for example, Hatton repeatedly alternates between Ma and the mayor to perform a duet *between the two*, finally emerging split down the middle – Ma on one side and the mayor on the other, to finish the song in a most amusing manner.

Joe DiPietro and David Bryan's songs run the gamut of styles, all enthusiastically directed and choreographed by Janet Miller. The book and lyrics are a lot of fun, aiming good-natured barbs at New Jersey (and making a few un-PC blind jokes at the expense of Sarah). None of it goes far enough to offend, however. It's a breezy entertainment whose goal is to get laughs and groans in equal measure, and it accomplishes that.

The Toxic Avenger Musical plays the Fringe Fest June 15-26 at the Sacred Fools Theatre Main Stage, 1076 Lillian Way. Tickets and more information can be found on the [Fringe site](#).



Cast of *The Toxic Avenger Musical* at the Fringe (l-r): Danny Fetter, Jared Reed, Shirley Anne Hatton, Kim Dalton and Wesley Tunison.