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Technical Theatre III 4

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American Idiot

On Saturday October 24, I watched American Idiot at Berkeley Rep. It was directed by Michael Mayer with music by Green Day. The show is about a group of three rebellious friends trying to get out of the suburbs. Will, one of the three friends, gets his girlfriend pregnant and cannot accompany his friends on their journey to the city. His girlfriend eventually leaves him and takes the baby - causing him to feel extremely alone. His friends Johnny and Tunny go off to the city together. Tunny is brainwashed by the media and joins the army. He is injured in combat and meets an extraordinary nurse while in the hospital. Meanwhile, Johnny stays in the city and gets mixed up in drugs and a girl whose name he cannot remember at the end of his experience. He becomes a slave to his addiction which causes him to lose the girl of his dreams. Eventually, the three friends return home and reunite.

The first thing I noticed in this show was the amazing set design by Christine Jones. The design set the lost and rebellious mood for the whole play. The walls were covered in newspaper showing their rundown style of living and the influence of the media on our lives. There were televisions and speakers covering the walls helping to show the influence of the media again. There were fire escape stairs that were very versatile; they created nice levels and detached to be rolled around to other parts of the stage. There was a threadbare couch that Will spent a majority of his time on. There was

a scaffolding unit that also turned into a bus when tipped over - making even more levels. The exposed metal framework gave the feeling of an older run-down city area. Windows and doors were hidden in the walls. There were also a warehouse door and a bathroom complete with toilet and wall graffiti on the inside. Chains suspended a shopping cart and a girl and there was also a car suspended above the stage. A simple bed with no headboard or anything was used in many scenes as well. There was a platform in the stage that rose like a scissor lift. The band was onstage with the actors and some of them were on the moving set pieces. The cellist was underneath the moving part of the fire escape and there was a violinist near the top of the fire escape. I felt that the set design created the right mood while remaining extremely versatile for all of the changes onstage. The setting was also able to transform due to the amazing lighting and video projection designs.

The lighting designer was Kevin Adams and the video and projection designer was Darrel Maloney. The lighting was colorful, bright, and exciting like a rock show. There were strobe lights in the speakers and lights in the floor. Most of the lighting came from projections but there were also gobos and color washes. There were many gobos used as blinds for windows. There were also god-like side lights when the actors lined up to join the army. Another really cool effect they had in this show was the use of an actual handheld video camera's images on the TV screens. The first time this was used was in the introduction of Saint Jimmy. The projections were easily seen on the newspaper-covered walls. Cityscapes were projected showing Johnny being engulfed by the city. The Television screens also had images relating to the characters' inner thoughts or set background for the situation. There was a reoccurring projection of a dark, masked

broken soldier with angel wings that appeared every time Saint Jimmy was onstage. I think this symbol represented Saint Jimmy as the “angelic” “patron saint” who was also extremely dark and dangerous. During the song “Give Me Novocain,” there was dark green lighting on stage and a fuzzy image on the TV like when your vision is blurred after getting gassed at the dentist’s office. During the war scenes there were intense strobes. The images on the TV screens become clear as the green night vision used by the soldiers in this war. These images showed explosions while the soldiers onstage scrambled and ducked. The lighting and projections were amazing. They allowed the audience to visualize scenarios better and to also get a real feel for the brainwashing and overwhelming influence of the media.

I enjoyed this musical more than I had expected to. I actually own Green Day’s CD *American Idiot*, but never really understood the story, though when I did listen to it I was probably too young to understand it anyways. I like how the story flowed so well and was able to mainly be told through the songs’ lyrics rather than large chunks of dialogue in between. The show was exciting and the characters were very interesting. I thought it was very cool that Johnny Gallagher Jr. was Johnny in the show, I always see him on the Spring Awakening posters and it was very surreal seeing him in reality. I was really blown away by the set and lighting, but also by the actors. Their dancing and singing was filled with so much passion and emotion that I could feel and experience it as an audience member. Overall I really enjoyed watching American Idiot would definitely like to see it again.