

Reviews

The Internationalist

★★★★★

Vineyard Theatre (see Off Broadway). By Anne Washburn. Dir. Ken Rus Schmoll. With ensemble cast.

Business traveler Lowell (Zak Orth) arrives in the unnamed Eastern European country in which *The Internationalist* is set, dripping with the fawning politeness of a stranger in a strange land. He's jittery, jet-lagged, quick to apologize and painstakingly pleasant, but there's a whiff of condescension here. It's that strained Yank hominess that says, "Sure, I'll honor your weird little customs, but we both know I'm in control." By the end of Anne Washburn's coldly keen study of cultural alienation and globalist occupation, the tables have been turned on Lowell—then turned again. In a foreign context, Washburn observes, language, manners and mores turn opaque and all attachments—corporate and romantic—become provisional.

The Internationalist marks Washburn's second Off Broadway

production (after 2004's brilliant *Apparition*) and bravo to the Vineyard for mounting it. The theater has also smartly retained original director Ken Rus Schmoll (the play was produced two years ago at the Culture Project), and he stages this wry, brittlely articulate thriller-comedy with his flair for shadowy, low-key menace. Schmoll also keeps his cast on the same page—not easy since Washburn's style depends on a high-tensile atmosphere of cryptic awkwardness. As a lowly office worker who begins an affair with the visiting Lowell, Annie Parisse is gently empathetic; Gibson Frazier's office lout is comical yet scary; Nina Hellman scores laughs as various tough women; and Ken Marks and Liam Craig round out the unusually fine cast. Most impressive, Washburn renders whole scenes in a gibberish-sounding nonce tongue ("Patchada pica hem frad!") that sounds funny, but also neatly precludes audience comprehension. Writing well is hard enough, but this fiercely imaginative dramatist has her English and eats it, too.—*David Cote*



LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION Orth, left, learns new tricks from native Parisse.

Grey Gardens

RECLUSE ABANDON
Wilson, left, and Ebersole
play Long Island hermits.



★★★★★

Walter Kerr Theatre (see Broadway). Book by Doug Wright. Music by Scott Frankel. Lyrics by Michael Korie. Dir. Michael Greif. With Christine Ebersole, Mary Louise Wilson, Erin Davie.

The abundantly satisfying musical *Grey Gardens* is the story of a haunted house: a ruined East Hampton mansion invisibly filled with strangled dreams of love, art and happiness. The sweet smell of decay hovers over the show's second act, closely based on a 1975 cult documentary about Edith Bouvier Beale and Little Edie Beale, two deranged relatives of Jackie Kennedy Onassis; in a contrast evocative of Stephen Sondheim's great *Follies*, the first act shows the same house and its occupants three decades earlier, in their doomed gilded glory.

Grey Gardens feels richer, deeper and more complete on Broadway than it did in its Off Broadway

version earlier this year; the flavorfulness of Doug Wright's revised book, the agility of Michael Korie's lyrics and the classic tunefulness of Scott Frankel's music combine to craft a jewel box of a musical. The phenomenal Christine Ebersole still anchors both halves of the story, playing the self-enamored socialite Edith in Act I and the disturbed nonconformist Edie in Act II; with this stunningly wide-ranging performance, Ebersole officially joins the musical-theater pantheon. But with the winning Erin Davie taking on the role of Edie in the first half, and Mary Louise Wilson spinning out magnificent webs of maternal entrapment in the second, *Grey Gardens* is more than just a double star turn for Ebersole. The show offers a moving portrait of motherhood and independence in a compromised world, as seen through the unluckily broken mirror of two unique and fascinating women: *Follies* à deux.—*Adam Feldman*

Evil Dead: The Musical

★★★★★

New World Stages (see Off Broadway). Book and lyrics by George Reinblatt. Music by Frank Cipolla, Melissa Morris, Christopher Bond and Reinblatt. Dirs. Hinton Battle and Bond. With ensemble cast.

In *The Evil Dead* (1981) and *Evil Dead II* (1987), director Sam Raimi did not set out to make bad films. He and his crew, along with B-movie ham Bruce Campbell, simply did their best with a small budget and an irrepressible sense of campy humor. That's more than can be said for this tacky parody-homage, a Canadian Fringe import that gets the "so bad

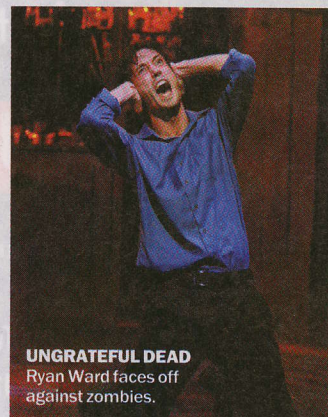
it's good" formula totally wrong. Unlike, say, the creators of *Urinetown*, who made a great musical from a terrible idea, the committee behind *Evil Dead: The Musical* takes a potentially great idea and runs it into the grave.

Four composers were required to write a score that a deaf dog could have banged out in an hour for a biscuit. The prerecorded sonic garbage consists mainly of tinny show rock inspired by *Little Shop of Horrors* and *The Rocky Horror Show*. At least George Reinblatt's insipidly vulgar lyrics are so poorly enunciated by the cast they're unintelligible.

The book attempts to reproduce

the source flicks' mix of genuine horror and over-the-top gory laughs: Five horny teens are holed up in a cabin; demonic book of incantations is read aloud; flesh-eating and mayhem ensue. There are isolated funny moments and resourceful stage effects (a severed, possessed hand and quick-change zombification), but it's a long slog to the climactic zombie dance and shotgun-chainsaw massacre (which would be worth the price of admission, were tickets only \$15). *Evil Dead* fanatics may gobble it up, but then, no one ever accused a deadite of having good taste.

—*David Cote*



UNGRATEFUL DEAD
Ryan Ward faces off
against zombies.

Theater