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Theatre Three's 'Flaming Guns' offers the wildest of the West

12:00 AM CDT on Wednesday, July 14, 2010

By LAWSON TAITTE / The Dallas Morning News

ltaitte@dallasnews.com

An announcement before the beginning of *Flaming Guns of the Purple Sage* warns that it contains (among other things) simulated gunfire, blood, simulated sex, country music and more blood. Otherwise, it's good clean fun.

Theatre Three opened its 2010-11 downstairs season with Jane Martin's comedy on Monday. The probably pseudonymous playwright (often supposed to be Louisville's Jon Jory) has created a riff on the old-fashioned Western, with a few gallons of Gothic horror mixed in.

A young rodeo champion, Rob Bob (Justin Vorpahl), lives by the values of Hopalong Cassidy and Gene Autry, where it's easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys. He admits he's not quite a hero yet, but he's sure he's one of the good ones. Retired rodeo gal Big 8 (Gene Raye Price), known for her mysterious healing powers, has been putting up Rob Bob after an injury. She likes having a man around the house, for all the obvious reasons.

Suddenly, trashy young thing Shedevil (Emily Jackson) bursts onto the scene. She claims she's pregnant by Big 8's long-lost son, but she's running from somebody much scarier – a Ukrainian biker named Black Dog (Jordan Willis). Rob Bob falls in love with Shedevil at first sight, but neither woman thinks that's a good thing.

Big 8's sister, Shirl (Sally Soldo), works in a meat-packing plant. A little blood doesn't bother her, and you'll have a better time at this show if it doesn't bother you. *Flaming Guns of the Purple Sage* gets most of its laughs by exaggerating the conventions of slasher flicks.

Under Terry Dobson's direction, Soldo anchors the show as Shirl takes the most horrible things in stride. Price does her generic good ol' girl routine, which works fine for this character. Vorpahl projects Rob Bob's innocence nicely, though he smiles in inappropriate places. Jackson turns in a sexy performance that might prove disorienting to those who have seen her grow up on the Theatre Three stage in juvenile roles.

Strong, silent men dominated the Old Westerns. In Martin's version, though, the women definitely rule the roost. Plan your life

Through Aug. 8 at Theatre Three in the Quadrangle, 2800 Routh St. 105 mins. \$25 to \$30. 214-871-3300, theatre3dallas.com.

