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## Theater review: Playhouse Nashville's 'Devil Sedan' a Riveting Ride

08/03/2013 by [Evans Donnell](#) (Edit)



"You got to get to the essence of a thing to know it," a wily mechanic named Delmar tells an unseen interviewer in **Kenley Smith's *Devil Sedan***. "You get down to a man's heart, nothin' else, you know the score."

The riveting ride provided by Smith's taut script and **Playhouse Nashville's** seamless production certainly knows the score when it comes to providing a top-quality theatrical experience. Yes, there's plenty of food for thought, but all involved understand that without generating the electricity that is theater's currency engaging drama is little better than dry debate.



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### RANDOM STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Theater review: 'Anything Goes' National Tour is the Tops

By [Evans Donnell](#)



*Devil Sedan* is making its Nashville debut, but the play already has a strong pedigree – for starters, it took top honors in the **2008 Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights** at Virginia’s historic, Tony Award-winning **Barter Theatre**. The drama is part of a trilogy written by Smith, who relocated from Roanoke, Va., to the Music City last year after spending time as an Ingram playwright-in-residence at **Tennessee Repertory Theatre**.

This contemporary story is set in the South, though the universality of the piece is underscored in the script; the playwright says this play could occur in “any place where darkness and light wage war in the hearts of men.”



The darkness and light are largely embodied in *Devil Sedan* by a booze-soaked ne’er-do-well named Bobby Pence (**Tony Morton**) and his world-weary older brother Harleigh (**David Chattam**) as well as oh-so-close teenagers Elea Whelan (**Rosemary Fossee**) and Maggie Thaxton (**Kristin McCalley**). An encounter between the brothers and the young women one night leads to a horrific crime and a divided community; the unraveling of what actually happened provides suspense while

Musical comedy is one of America’s greatest gifts to the world of entertainment. And *Anything Goes*, which served as the template for so many musical comedies to follow, has docked in Nashville with a de-lightful national tour. A wait-and-see energy was in the air as opening night subscribers and other patrons assembled in Tennessee Performing [...]

## Film review: Bone-Chilling ‘Stoker’ a Worthy Successor to Hitchcock

By **Evans Donnell**

“You know I’ve wondered why it is we have children,” Evelyn Stoker (Nicole Kidman) muses at one point in Park Chan-wook’s bone-chilling *Stoker*. “And the conclusion I’ve come to is – we want someone to get it right this time.” Well, looked at one way the well-to-do Stokers may have succeeded beyond their wildest – [...]

## Theater review: BRT is Wonderfully Up to ‘Floyd Collins’ Challenge

By **Evans Donnell**

FRANKLIN, Tenn. – Since 2001 Boiler Room Theatre has worked hard to earn its well-deserved reputation for presenting engaging musical fare. They have enjoyed challenges and taken risks, and many of those risks have paid off. They may have taken perhaps their biggest risk with the complex music for *Floyd Collins*, and that risk has paid [...]

## Classical review: Rejoice greatly, O fans of ‘Messiah’

By **John Pitcher**

After an absence of nearly two months, Giancarlo Guerrero returned to the Schermerhorn Symphony Center on Thursday night, and he brought with him his favorite musical Christmas card. That would be Handel’s *Messiah*, the beloved Baroque oratorio that’s the focus of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra’s final classical subscription concert of 2012. Guerrero conducts *Messiah* every [...]

## Time Jumpers shine in their new home at 3rd and Lindsley

By **Quinton Parker**

Tourists come to Nashville from all over the world to see country stars playing twangy guitars. However, it’s often hard to discern the proverbial “real deal” from

questioning our preconceived notions about the characters and the society that fosters those notions.

While there's plenty of suspense amid the probe of faith and duty, there are also some well-aimed send-ups; modern fire-and-brimstone Minister Graves (**Richard Daniel**) shifts in the blinking of an eye from condemning "sodomites and naysayers, abortionists and liberals" to promoting a bake sale for the "Footsteps for Christ" youth group to which Whelan and Thaxton belong.



The 11-member cast features clearly-etched performances that serve the play's dramatic moments and thematic threads well. Those sure-footed portrayals include Daniel's sinners-in-the-hands-of-an-angry-God preacher, **Rachel Agee's** miracle-seeking Lillian (counter-played nicely by **Laura Crockarell's** seen-it-all Nurse), **Phil Perry's** damaged Delmar, **Andy Kanies'** duplicitous Lester Atkinson, **Becky Wahlstrom's** vengeful Mrs. Whelan and **Keri Pisapia's** forgiving Mrs. Thaxton.

Morton and Chattam beautifully manage the difficult balance between conflict and care that their sibling brothers must display in every word, look and gesture during their time together onstage. Both are veteran actors that certainly know how to make that balance believable, but it's still the product of fully investing in each moment so that story and audience reap the dividends.

its many weaker incarnations scattered about the city. For this sought after "real deal", one has to go no further than 3rd and Lindsley. The Time Jumpers, one [...]

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## Please help support arts journalism

By **ArtsNash**

Nashville's vibrant arts scene has kept the editors, writers and interns of ArtsNash busy. Since the beginning of this season, we have posted more than 300 stories and reviews. Naturally, we have written about many of Nashville's major cultural institutions – the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Tennessee Repertory Theatre, Nashville Ballet, Nashville Opera [...]

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## Tense Two-Hander 'Blackbird' Has Nashville Premiere at ABE

By **ArtsNash**

The tense two-hander *Blackbird* has been gripping audiences around the world for several years now. The award-winning play comes to Nashville Friday through June 15 thanks to Actors Bridge Ensemble. Shows are Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. at the Actors Bridge Studio in the rear of the building at 4304-F [...]

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## Video Files: New Peter Gunn set celebrates '50s private eye

By **Ron Wynn**

Along with westerns, another dominant genre on late '50s and early '60s network television was the private eye (detectives). These were guys (with the exception of ABC's *Honey West* starring Anne Francis) with style and flair who took cases regular cops either ignored, were afraid to handle, or wouldn't touch for various reasons. Some had [...]

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## Classical review: Opera star Eric Owens presents a serious, stellar concert at Blair

By **John Pitcher**

Eric Owens sings serious songs that explore the full spectrum of human sentiment. His recitals, as a general rule, don't make for easy listening. So the renowned bass baritone seemed genuinely gratified at the end of his concert on Saturday night at the Blair School of Music's Ingram Hall. Owens and his collaborative pianist, Warren [...]

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Fossee and McCalley are stunning as the two teens. Both are only a few years older than the characters they play, but that doesn't mean they have an easy job fashioning these roles; it takes an artistic maturity rarely seen in actors of any age to make their flesh-and-blood portraits so real. These two don't "comment" on their characters as more than a few actors do; they present them in their entirety for us to access and assess. Fossee's heart-rending first scene – I bet you won't hear the hymn "In the Garden" in future without remembering it – sets the bar high, and McCalley answers by joining her in the heights.

**David Compton** is well-known for his acting abilities, but his cleverly-dressed set – Compton has created what appear to be sections of broken stained-glass where the window grilles resemble rope – demonstrates for those unfamiliar with his work behind-the-scenes that his talents aren't limited to performance. **Mike Baum** – who knows a thing or two about quality vocal sound – provides an excellent comprehensive sound design for this show (including a contribution from musician **Eric Fritsch** on a cover of "House of the Rising Sun" that helps set the mood nicely).

## Opera Review: Belmont Opera Theatre hits all the right notes in 'Figaro'

By **Kyle J. Baker**

I hadn't been back on Belmont University's campus in years before last night and was pleasantly surprised. The campus was bustling – streets full of cars, sidewalks full of people. Things were even more energetic inside the university's intimate Trout Theatre on Thursday night, when Belmont Opera Theatre's new production of *The Marriage of Figaro* [...]

## Music Review: An emotional recital from trombonist Jeremy Wilson

By **John Pitcher**

Trombonist Jeremy Wilson almost canceled the terrific recital he presented Sunday night at the Blair School of Music's Turner Hall. Wilson's longtime friend and mentor, University of North Texas trombone professor Vern Kagarice, died two weeks ago after a long illness. A celebratory service for the revered trombonist was scheduled for the same day as Wilson's [...]

## Lauren Gunderson wins Steinberg/ATCA Award for 'I and You'

By **ArtsNash**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – The American Theatre Critics Association (ATCA) has selected Lauren Gunderson's *I and You* as the recipient of the Harold and Mimi Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award, recognizing playwrights for scripts that premiered professionally outside New York City during 2013, it was announced today. Gunderson's delicate but droll play about teenagers exploring [...]

## Classical review: Samis soars in music of Bach, Bloch, Tavener and Golijov

By **John Pitcher**

Nashville's classical fans have long known of cellist Michael Samis' intensely expressive artistry. On Sunday afternoon at Christ Church Cathedral, Samis revealed yet another side of his musical personality: Fearlessness. Samis' concert was part of the Cathedral's marvelous Sacred Space for the City Arts Series. Four of the five works on his program were written [...]





The sharp fight choreography of **Eric D. Pasto-Crosby**, the finger-on-the-pulse lighting of **Katie Gant** and the character-contained costuming of **Hannah Schmidt** are tied with other elements into a nice bow by Director **Christopher R.C. Bosen**. Bosen, Assistant Director **Rebekah Durham**, Stage Manager **Mary Jo Weaver** and Producer **Nate Eppler** complete as impressive an ensemble of artists and artisans as any group here can boast.

"It is how we deal with the least of us, the most despised of us, that marks the enlightenment of our civilization," Mrs. Thaxton implores us to understand at one point in the play. To embrace that enlightenment takes more than reason's sway, however; human compassion comes from hearts, not heads. Smith and Playhouse Nashville clearly understand that, and the ride they provide in their *Devil Sedan* is one every theater lover in town should take.



**Playhouse Nashville** presents Kenley Smith's *Devil Sedan* through Aug. 11 in residence at **Street Theatre Company** (1933 Elm Hill Pk.).

## Film review: 'Dark Knight Rises' brings trilogy to a heroic end

By **John Pitcher**

The *Dark Knight Rises* is filled with inevitability. Surely, it was foreordained that Bruce Wayne and his alter ego, Batman, would emerge from self-imposed exile if finally faced with a worthy foe. It was likewise assured that their fated confrontations would be as violent and relentless as the nearly three-hour-long, percussion-heavy soundtrack that accompanies director [...]

## Music Review: At Blair Composers' Concert, it's 'goodnight noises everywhere'

By **Kyle J. Baker**

I slipped in just in time to catch the first down beat on Monday night at the Blair School of Music Composers Concert. Vanderbilt University has a number of things going for its composition program. I love how they consistently bring in guest artists, since it helps expose students to a lot of important contemporary [...]

## Music Review: Nashville Symphony Soars in Mahler's Seventh

By **John Pitcher**

Gustav Mahler's Seventh Symphony is a kind of sonic Grand Canyon: It's a breathtaking wonder, a marvel of musical emotion that can only be fully appreciated in person. No recording, no YouTube video can ever do it justice. Mahler's sprawling, 85-minute orchestral essay is anchoring the Nashville Symphony Orchestra's program this weekend at the Schermerhorn [...]

## Shaw and Stratford 2014: Great Treats in Store for Theater Lovers

By **David Grapes**

Those who are passionate about quality theater here in the U.S. should consider a trip north across the Canadian border into Ontario where they can spend some serious time exploring North America's two largest theater festivals – The Shaw Festival and The Stratford Festival. The American dollar appears to have stabilized against the Canadian dollar, so the [...]

## Theater Review: A Brilliant NCT Encore for

Performances begin at 7:30 p.m. each night except for Aug. 5. Tickets (\$15) and more info are available by calling (615) 669-5792 or visiting [www.playhousenashville.com](http://www.playhousenashville.com).



## 'Schoolhouse Rock Live!'

By [Evans Donnell](#)

Nashville Children's Theatre has brought Schoolhouse Rock Live! back for an encore with new staging and cast that will light your fire. Nashville's premier professional troupe presented the stage adaptation of songs from the groundbreaking ABC-TV animated educational shorts series in 2006. That Julee Baber Brooks-directed show was inventively staged (Scott Leathers' chessboard-floor apartment set [...])

## Music Review: El Movimiento, bringing Latin jazz to the people

By [Lindsay George](#)

"Those are the rules – No cell phones. Please dance. That's all." It was the only introduction needed for Nashville's only Latin jazz band, El Movimiento. Taking the Nashville Jazz Workshop stage Saturday night to a full house, it was clear that no one would be on their cell phone during this performance anyway. Founding [...]

## Jazz Plus: Ron Wynn picks some of his favorite blues and world music CDs just in time for Christmas

By [Ron Wynn](#)

James Booker "Classified: Remixed and Expanded" (Rounder) New Orleans piano marvel James Booker combined artistry, soul and technique in a flamboyant, remarkable fashion that established his rank in the upper echelon of pianists in any genre. Originally issued in 1982, "Classified" remains perhaps the only Booker album that those not plugged into the underground scene (where bootleg cassettes [...])

\*Photos by [Britanie Knapp](#) courtesy Playhouse Nashville.

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## About Evans Donnell



Evans Donnell is the chief theater, film and opera critic as well as co-founder of ArtsNash. He wrote reviews and features about theater, opera and classical music for *The Tennessean* from 2002 to 2011. He was the theater, film and opera critic for ArtNowNashville.com from 2011 to 2012. Donnell has also contributed to The Sondheim Review, Back Stage, *The City Paper* (Nashville), the *Nashville Banner*, *The* (Bowling Green, Ky.) *Daily News* and several other publications since

beginning his professional journalism career in 1985 with *The Lebanon* (Tenn.) *Democrat*. He was selected as a fellow for the 2004 National Critics Institute at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, and for National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) arts journalism institutes for theater and musical theater at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism in 2006 and classical music and opera at the Columbia University School of Journalism in 2009. He has also been an actor (member of Actors Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA), founding and running AthensSouth Theatre from 1996 to 2001 and appearing in Milos Forman's "The People vs Larry Flynt" among other credits. Donnell is a member of the American Theatre Critics Association ([www.americantheatre critics.org](http://www.americantheatre critics.org)).

## Comments



**carolponderandrobekiefer** says:  
08/03/2013 at 11:19 AM (Edit)

What a thoughtful and eloquent review of what promises to be a terrific theatrical experience  
- Thanks Evans - We'll do our best to get there! Carol



**Evans Donnell** says:  
08/04/2013 at 2:57 AM (Edit)

Thank you!