

Bat's Entertainment

Biting satire from tabloid trash

By [Robrt L. Pela](#)

Published: June 7, 2007

I ran from the theater during curtain calls for Nearly Naked's production of *Bat Boy: The Musical* the other night, but not because I was either unhappy with or overcome by what I'd seen. I was fleeing because, during the show's final number, I'd received a call from a young woman in India who wanted me to know that someone had tripped the security system in my home in Phoenix, less than a mile from the theater where I was seated. I never take calls during live productions, but I do carry my cell phone with me in the event that someone phones to alert me to the burglary of my home. Someone had (someone from *India!*), and I was horrified.



Jimmy Hayes Nelson takes a bite from the tabloids in *Bat Boy: The Musical*.

Where:

the Little Theatre at Phoenix Theatre, 100 East McDowell Road

Details:

Continues through June 30. Call 602-254-2151.

Subject(s): [Bat Boy: The Musical](#), [Nearly Naked Theatre](#), [Bat Boy](#), [Weekly World News](#)

I'd passed a pleasant couple of hours before this startling interruption, even though *Bat Boy* is ultimately a musical in need of a first act. Nearly Naked's production benefits from Damon Dering's darkly comic, crafty direction and from a pair of performances that help elevate it from high camp to something closer to art. Still, Keythe Farley and Brian Fleming's book is

slow to start, and composer-lyricist Laurence O'Keefe's many clever tunes include very few memorable melodies, a problem that will keep this tuner from reaching the heights of other camp classics like *Rocky Horror* or *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Bat Boy does set some kind of precedent as the first musical inspired by a supermarket tabloid story – in this case, a rather infamous one from *Weekly World News* about a half-boy, half-bat found in a cave in West Virginia. As envisioned by Farley and Fleming, two of the creators of *Rugrats*, he's a quickly tamed mammal with perfect pitch and punchy comic timing who (at least as performed by Jimmy Hays Nelson) steals the show once he begins singing and dancing toward the end of Act One.

Up until that point, the show is a coy, campy commentary on prejudice and intolerance kept afloat by Dering's broad, smartly satirical direction and the talents of Athena Hunting who, as Bat Boy's adoptive mother, has a true musical star's pipes and smashing stage presence. Dering has the large-ish chorus cross-dressing for no reason other than to augment the already zany story about small-minded small-townners forced to face send-ups of popular B horror films.

In the lead, Nelson is delightful – equal parts Jerry Lewis and Thom Tryon, a singing, dancing marvel whose busking is rivaled only by his way with a song. He's well-supported by Mark 4man's seven-piece band, which renders O'Keefe's peppy rock score from somewhere offstage. Several other performers do their best to keep up, but Act One is little more than an hour of exposition that not even Dering's endless fussing can make a masterpiece of. Stay for Act Two of *Bat Boy*, one half of an entertaining show that – dare I say it? – doesn't suck.