

# Bloody hilarious

Summer may be over but camp is still in session

by Richard Costello

Divine Co-op, led by producer/director/actor Evan Tsitsias, is bringing the camp cult classic *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* to Buddies in Bad Times Theatre Oct 16 to 21.

One of the longest running plays in Off-Broadway history, playwright Charles Busch's drag-fest chronicles two fatally seductive vampiresses whose paths first collide in ancient Sodom. Their bitter rivalry as bloodsuckers but more importantly, as actresses, endures for 2000 years with stops along the way in 1920's silent movie Hollywood and contemporary Las Vegas.

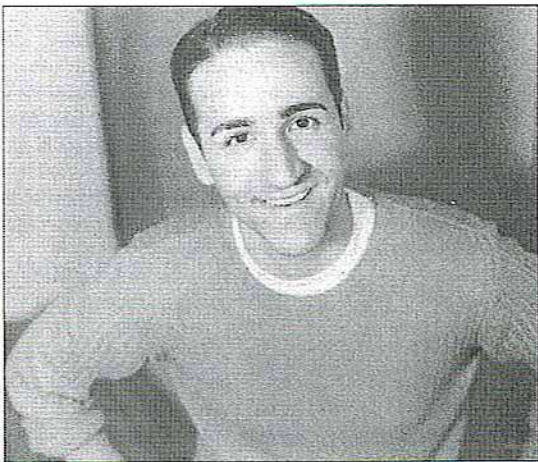
In ancient Sodom, a virgin sacrifice is offered to the dreaded Succubus, a beautiful vampire who has been terrorizing the city. The virgin pleads for her life, but to no avail, and is devoured by the monster. Centuries later, we find ourselves in the mansion of La Condeysa. She is none other than Succubus, now a famous actress and goddess of the Silver Screen. While La Condeysa awaits the arrival of a prestigious magazine reporter, the great stage actress Madeleine Astarte arrives uninvited. She is of course, the Virgin of Sodom, returned with a vengeance. Their battle continues into present day Las Vegas.

Tsitsias, who earlier this year produced and directed the well-received revue *Don't Tell Mama*, also at Buddies, promises some interesting changes to *Vampires*. "We've composed an underscore for the script, so that it plays like the old-time silent movies with melodramatic live music," he says. "It will be as if they've just stepped off the silver screen."

James Greenwood plays the Virgin of Sodom, the pivotal drag role. At a recent rehearsal, Greenwood looks every bit the part — wide-eyed, open-faced innocence. He knows that the character will be difficult. "How do you do the face and attitude of a 14-year-old virgin girl?," he wonders, even though his antics have got the cast in stitches. Teetering precariously on heels, he falls prey to the temptress Succubus, played by the outrageous Sally Johns. Johns, whose first principal role was Maria in *The Sound of Music*, is definitely singing a different tune with this evil sorceress. She's all grand gestures and a sultry, commanding voice.

Tsitsias has also altered the normal casting of one of the roles — a female gossip columnist/vampire hunter, written for a man in drag, is being played by a woman. "It's a woman playing a man playing a woman... gee, that sounds like Shakespeare," says the director. Suzette Arajo, who plays the reporter, comes across as diminutive but butch dynamite — Joan Rivers with attitude.

The cast is rounded out by Mark Allen as King Carlisle, Michael Boisvert, a hunky muscle boy who plays Hujar, Sarah Martyn and Jonathan Chambers, most of whom worked with



Tsitsias in *Don't Tell Mama*. The show is choreographed by Jennifer Cohen.

Costumes have come from a wide variety of sources. Tsitsias spent months shopping Kensington Market to find authentic 20s dresses and the Salvation Army and Value Village for the 80s look. He even sewed some himself. "The costumes are really over the top," he says.

It seems like a natural to have a drag-intensive show so close to Halloween, but Tsitsias admits it was just a happy accident. "I'd love to say it was planned, but it was so not on purpose," he explains.

Tsitsias is clear about the reasons Divine Co-op, the production company behind the show, is reviving what some might see as ancient history. "I don't think people have seen this kind of theatre in Toronto for a while, and the younger crowd has never heard of it," he says. "It's very clever, the cast is incredible — it's going to be grander than people expect in a small space."

Pulling off a classic is a tough job, but the cast appears to be up to the challenge. At rehearsal, the tiniest bits of business are worked over and over again. In comedy, timing is everything and the actors clearly know their business. Every snap of the fan, every turn of the head, every snide aside ("that bitch stole my schnauzer!") is analyzed, explored and choreographed. The lines are a scream: "I wonder if any man has ever pierced your enigma"(pause) "Just let him try!" If the level of energy at rehearsal is any indicator, audiences are in for a treat.

*Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* plays Buddies in Bad Times Theatre at 8 pm from Oct. 16 to 21. Tickets are \$15 at the box office.