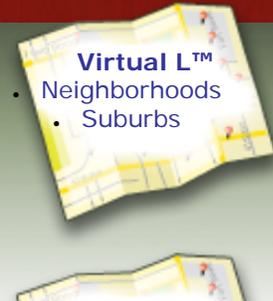




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Theater Shows

Bloody Bess: A Tale of Piracy and Revenge

Murder and revenge take centerstage in this pirate-filled suspense.

[Reviewed by Centerstage!](#) >>



Venue: Storefront Theater

Tickets: \$20; \$18 students & seniors

Company

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Performances

Runs June 12, 2008-July 20, 2008

Friday 7:30 p.m. (no performance on 7/4)

Saturday 7:30 p.m.

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Recommended a "Must See" Show

Storefront old-timers like to ramble on about the raw-and-ready days of the '70s. Were they really that good? Find out at Backstage Theatre's revival of the vintage Organic Theatre hit "Bloody Bess." With its outsize story, ten-cent spectacle and extremely limited original audience, it's a cultier cult classic than anything you can rent on DVD. Critics love director/fight choreographer Geoff Coates's ultra-violent take on the story of Elizabeth Presberty, a governor's daughter who finds piracy via revenge. According to their raves, the story may flirt with camp, but the performers' emotional attack is as pleasingly brutal as their swordplay.

Centerstage Show Review

Reviewer: [Rosalind Cummings-Yeates](#)

Wednesday Jun 18, 2008

It used to be that portrayals of rum-swilling, sword-twirling pirates languished in dark corners reserved for Errol Flynn movies and bad community theater. But thanks to "Pirates of The Caribbean," we are now routinely treated to these over-the-top impressions on TV, in movies, in bars and yes, in professional theater. Backstage Theatre Company's "Bloody Bess" magnifies these familiar characters and rolls them into a super campy, blood-splashed drama that entertains with the sheer melodrama of it all.

It's worth noting that Backstage's production is a revival of Organic Theatre's wildly popular 1974 original, which featured Joe Mantegna and Meshach Taylor, no less. Of course, that was way before "Pirates of the Caribbean" sent hammy pirates swishing through our collective consciousness, rendering all swashbuckler images that followed a little less interesting. Indeed, there's nothing fresh or original about "Bloody Bess." We've seen it all before. The highborn governor's daughter kidnapped by nasty pirates. The dastardly fiance who betrays her. The sudden ability to expertly wield a rapier after just a month's practice. The actors make the production fun by not taking the play too seriously, letting the audience in on the silliness.

Loosely based on the true stories of female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, "Bloody Bess" follows the tale of Elizabeth Presberty (an able Eva Swan), the daughter of the governor of Tobago. She is held captive for ransom by Levoisseur, (a dashing portrayal with a horrifying accent by Gregory Isaac) a dishonored French aristocrat turned pirate. His crew

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includes fierce female pirate Annie Bailey (a convincing Stephanie Repin) and a menacing Calico Jack (a thrilling Dave Skvarla). They end up being Bess' crew when she turns pirate to wreck revenge on her double-crossing fiancé, Commodore Eaton (a fittingly evil Scott Graham).

Although Williams J. Norris and John Ostrander's story is flimsy, Geoff Coates' directing manages to squeeze some humanity out of the broad caricatures. Renaissance Faire regulars will recognize many of the costumes but the brass buckled shoes and a wicked leather frock coat on Calico Jack add to the pleasing campiness of the production. The highlight is the fight choreography done with real swords brandished with delicious malice. "Bloody Bess" offers light-hearted fun and over-the-top drama for those who enjoy live-action piracy.

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