

THEATER REVIEW | 'BUSH WARS'

'Bush Wars,' a Satirical Revue With an Agenda

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Rick Meyerowitz, who drew for the 1970's-era National Lampoon, provides the program illustration for "Bush Wars," a satirical revue of song parodies and sketches conceived by Jim Russek and written by Nancy Holson. His drawing, a parody of the Al Hirschfeld illustration for "My Fair Lady," depicts a puppet master manipulating a marionette, but in this case, Dick Cheney, not Henry Higgins, holds the strings while George W. Bush instead of Eliza Doolittle does the dancing.

The picture is apt since "Bush Wars" is, at its frequent best, a broad, roaring and unapologetically tasteless entertainment reminiscent of Mad and National Lampoon. What it lacks of the acidity of the latter, it gains in the "What, Me Worry?" irreverence of the former, making for an altogether charming 90-minute show.



Front row, Abigail Nessen and Jay Falzone; back row, Andrea McCormick and Chris Van Hoy, in "Bush Wars" at the Rattlestick Theater.

Of course, "Bush Wars," presented by Help Is On the Way L.L.C., wears its ideology on its sleeve, and there is little doubt that the appreciative audience shares the viewpoint. Republicans and revilers of Mad magazine are unlikely to find the sledgehammer humor nearly as amusing. The story weaving the show together assumes that the president is a pawn in Satan's plan to destroy America. Sketches set in New Orleans and the vice president's bedroom (and whom does he find in his bed but Hallie Burton and Becca Tel?) skitter merrily over the day's affairs, the storm of satiric arrows finding their targets more often than not.

Two performers transcend the show's slapdash production values. Abigail Nessen performs a blues number late in the evening that reveals not only a tremendous musical talent but also a raw honesty and sincere righteousness. But Jay Falzone, who choreographed and co-directed the show with Ms. Holson, is the real find here: shifting easily between Satan, Jesus Christ and a depressive Darwinian specimen in a cheap ape suit, he reaches an energetic intensity in his

best scenes that propels the evening to heights of helpless mania, especially when he takes the role of Senator Bill Frist and lets loose as a mad doctor.

If the thought of Mr. Bush and Osama bin Laden, along with their mothers, engaging in a salad-fork duel at an Olive Garden restaurant to the tune of "America," from "West Side Story," sounds appealing, this show is for you.

Performances continue through April 16 at Rattlestick Theater, 224 Waverly Place, at 11th Street, West Village; (212) 868-4444.