

What's Happenin': Thursday, June 21, through Wednesday, July 4

Written by Mike Schulz

Tuesday, 19 June 2012 06:00

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Theatre

Xanadu

The District Theatre

Friday, June 29, through Saturday, July 14

In the new musical at Rock Island's District Theatre, California chalk artist Sonny Malone finds himself frustrated with the design for his latest sidewalk mural, and plans to commit suicide. Viewing his distress from Mount Olympus, the muse Clio decides to travel to Earth to cheer him

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up, disguised as an Australian roller-skater in leg warmers. Upon meeting Clio, Sonny is inspired to open a lavish roller disco, an idea that doesn't sit well with Clio's evil sisters Melpomene and Calliope. Eventually, a retired-clarinetist-turned-real-estate-broker gets involved, and then the winged horse Pegasus, and then Zeus ... and if you think this sounds like the stupidest storyline ever conceived for a stage production, I couldn't agree more.

Race you for tickets.

The stupidity, you see, is absolutely intentional. Based on the notoriously awful 1980 movie musical that starred Olivia Newton-John and Gene Kelly, *Xanadu* is the brainchild of book-writer Douglas Carter Beane and composers/lyricists John Farrar and (the Electric Light Orchestra's) Jeff Lynne, who must have sensed something of genius – or at least camp perfection – in that big-screen atrocity. A tongue-in-cheek ode to 1980s tackiness, their

Xanadu

laughs at the ridiculousness of its own narrative while also celebrating the breezy pop delights of the period, expressed through such guilty-pleasure hits as “Magic,” “Evil Woman,” “Suddenly,” “Have You Never Been Mellow,” and, of course, the über-catchy title track.

Xanadu was nominated for four 2008 Tony Awards, including Best Musical, and its area production will feature popular area performers Jenny Winn and Bryan Tank as the bubble-headed romantic leads who frequently croon on skates. Yet if all that isn't enough to get you in the District Theatre doors, maybe these quotes will help. The *New York Times* called

Xanadu

“simultaneously indefensible and irresistible” and praised its “sharp good humor and magnetic high spirits.”

The New Yorker

described the original production as “probably the most fun you'll have on Broadway this season,” a show that “points out just how tame most other musicals are.” And as Calliope herself says in Beane's script, “This is like children's theatre for 40-year-old gay people!” I'm not sure I'd put that last one on a poster, but honesty in the arts is always refreshing, yes?

Xanadu runs June 29 through July 14, and information and tickets are available by calling (309)235-1654 or visiting DistrictTheatre.com.

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Music

Tinsley Ellis

The Redstone Room

Monday, July 2, 7:30 p.m.

It's entirely possible that, on July 2, area blues fans will find themselves experiencing symptoms of withdrawal, knowing it'll be a year before the next Mississippi Valley Blues Festival. Davenport's Redstone Room, however, will offer a Monday-night respite from the gloom with a special performance by hard-rocking blues guitarist/vocalist Tinsley Ellis, who has performed in all 50 states, has shared stages with the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan, the Allman Brothers, and Koko Taylor, and has emerged as one of our country's most acclaimed blues musicians.

How acclaimed? Glad you asked!

Rolling Stone wrote that Ellis' "eloquence dazzles," and "he achieves pyrotechnics that rival early Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton."

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Blues Revue raved, "Ellis' vocals are expressive and often stirring."

The *Village Voice* called him "raw and righteous, funky and strong."

The *Associated Press* praised Ellis' "powerful Southern-flavored blues rock," his "fiery guitar attack," and his "vocals infused with a menacing weight."

The *Chicago Tribune* stated, "Ellis takes classic, Southern-blues-rock workouts and jolts them to new life with a torrid axe barrage."

The *Los Angeles Times* opined, "Ellis unleashes a torrent of dazzling musicianship pitched somewhere between the exhilarating volatility of rock-and-roll and the melancholic passion of urban blues."

And the *Chicago Sun-Times* said, "It's hard to overstate the raw power of his music."

Yes. But given 200-ish words, I sure gave it a try!

Tickets to Tinsley Ellis' Redstone Room concert are \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door, and can be reserved by calling (563)326-1333 or visiting RiverMusicExperience.org .

