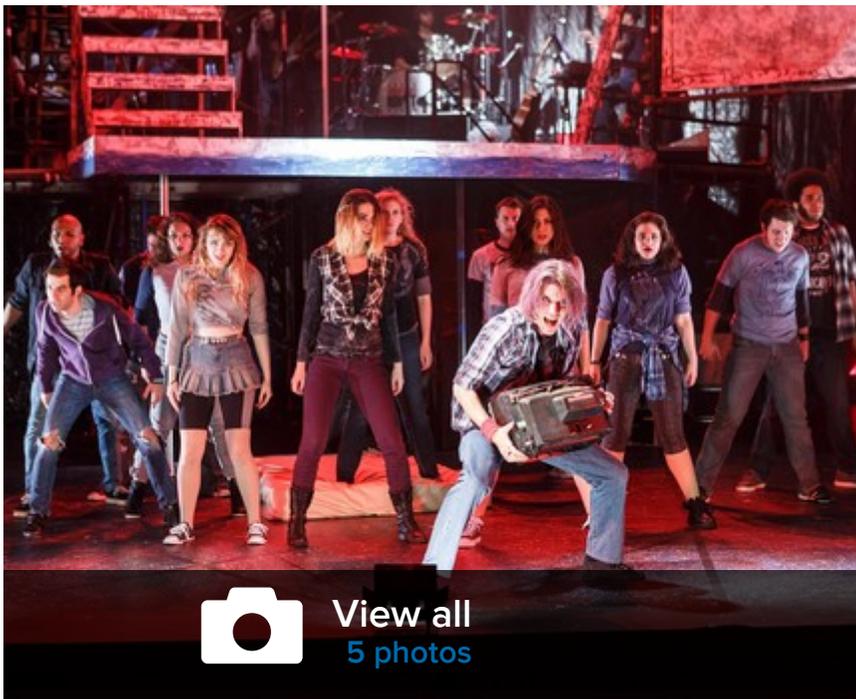


American angst takes over Beck Center in 'American Idiot'

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American Idiot at the Beck Center - Left to Right: Carlos Antonio Cruz, Pat Miller, Kristen Hoffman, Carleigh Spence, Tekla Gaughan, Annalise Griswold, Dan Folino, Danny Simpson, Olivia Kaufmann, Codie Higer, Kyle Burnett, Devon Jordan

Patrick R. Murphy/PRM Digital Productions

American Idiot at Beck Center for the Arts

Rating: ★★★★★

Punk rock rages against the Jesus of Suburbia at the Beck Center, as a large cast storms onto the Mackey Main Stage in [Green Day's](#) stage adaptation of the album, "[American Idiot](#)." Running now through August 16, 2015, the high-energy show is rated PG-13 for content.

In the 2013 documentary titled "Broadway Idiot," Green Day front man Billie Joe Armstrong says,

“There’s [sic] people that like to do things the safe way, and that’s never been part of my vocabulary.” “[American Idiot](#)” (AI) is far from safe, and is fueled by the anger and uncertainty of a disenfranchised youth in the post-9/11 world.

Praised as “a groundbreaking musical knockout” by Rolling Stone, this production boldly takes the American musical to unfamiliar yet fascinating realms.

AI is not a standard musical, but it is also not a straight opera. It is a sung through piece featuring the songs of Green Day’s album, with the choreography and large-group movements demonstrating the feelings and misfortunes of the main characters.

Loosely explained, the audience is brought into the world of Johnny, Will and Tunny as they agree to escape their tiny town, and then get lead down self-destructive paths. It’s a 90-minute journey of learning the hard lessons in life.

“I just wanted to get the hell out of my town, I just wanted to leave with reckless abandon,” explains Armstrong in the documentary. And each song reflects some of his soul along the way.

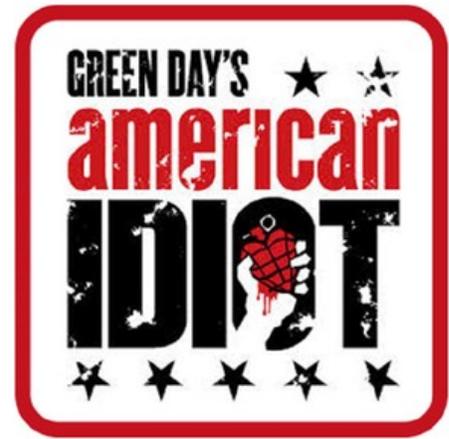
Director Scott Spence has packed massive amounts of power into this pulsating production. One of the most impressive parts of the show is the prolific use of the talented ensemble. Many ensembles in [theater](#) pieces seem extraneous and random, often feeling out of place if used willy nilly. But the presence of this ensemble is continuous and enigmatic, giving the show a spirit and animated life that embodies the angst in us all.

The other outstanding element of the show is the AI orchestra, co-led by Larry Goodpaster and Bryan Bird. A mighty band of eight rocks the house with raw abandon, doing justice not only to the Green Day score, but to Tom Kitt’s fantastic arrangements. The string section brings a particular layer of nuance to the organized chaos of punk music, and it’s awesomely beautiful.

Leading the cast is stage veteran Dan Folino as Johnny. Although a bit out of the age range of the character, Folino’s performance does not lack zest. He fiercely attacks the Armstrong music with a commandingly trained vocal ability and an anguish that is raw.

Johnny’s alter-ego is St. Jimmy, played by Beck Center newbie Joe Virgo. Virgo’s presence is imposing, providing a magnetic manifestation of all of Johnny’s inner demons. His vocals are strong, and his acting is the most layered and electric of the company.

Riley Ewing and Jonathon Walker White do respectable jobs as Will and Tunny, respectively. Ewing’s



Green Day's American Idiot

journey as a deadbeat new dad, and White's portrayal of a military man who loses his leg are dark and disturbing. Like Johnny, the characters are a couple of losers finding their way in an uncertain world.

Although not the central focus of the production itself, the lead women do a wonderful job of providing more layers of emotional substance to a show that is full of bad choices by the male characters. Heather (Annalise Griswold) starts out as a partyer but becomes someone who wants to be a good mom. Whatsername (Olivia Kaufmann) begins as a fling who's also doing drugs with Johnny, but she sees what it's doing to him and eventually wants something better. The Extraordinary Girl (Kristen Hoffman) is a caring nurse who tends to Tunny after he loses his leg. All of these women have great voices.

Many songs are in pure Green Day form, and some have been hauntingly reimagined. "Last Night on Earth" is a special treat with the ethereal string and ensemble additions. "21 Guns" keeps its groove but gets a choral eeriness. Other familiar songs include "Holiday" (featuring a rock-out moment by Pat Miller), "Boulevard of Broken Dreams," "Give Me Novacaine," "Know Your Enemy," and "Wake Me Up When September Ends."

Lacking in this production are a flying element that was in the Broadway version, and a general lack of depth in the male leads. It is hard to empathize with these boozing, lazy guys who don't seem to really be searching for something better (as intended by Armstrong), but merely are just getting by with their poor choices. By the end, the piece should reflect a coming home with lessons learned, and give a sense of hope. This production leaves the audience with a sense of defeat, although sometimes that's just how life goes. Perhaps that's the point of this rendition? We can't always get what we want, and ultimately we're left where we are, still wandering aimlessly amidst what life throws our way.

Choreographer Martín Céspedes has kept the sizzle in the choreography, as his movement gives a wild vigor to the company. Scenic & Lighting Designer Trad A Burns makes the Beck stage look huge, with the metal scaffolding providing levels, depth and height to the drama of the rock concert lighting. Nods go to Assoc. Scenic & Lighting Designer Benjamin Gantose for his help in that. Co-Projection Designers Douglas Puskas and Adam Zeek do a bang up job of incorporating the George W. Bush-era news clips, symbolism and pop images into the many giant set TVs that continuously bombard the crowd with flashbacks from times now gone. Costume Designer Jenniver Sparano is spot-on with punk/grunge-era clothing. And although many of the lyrics get lost in the hum of the orchestra, Sound Designer Richard B. Ingraham has given an efficient concert sound to the production.

"American Idiot" features music by Green Day (which also includes Tre Cool and Mike Dirnt), lyrics by Billie Joe Armstrong, book by Billie Joe Armstrong and Michael Mayer, with musical arrangements and orchestrations by Tom Kitt.

With music from the "Best Rock Album" of the 2005 Grammy Awards®, audiences will recognize

many songs from the radio. For those not as familiar with Green Day, it is easy to lose a lot of the lyrics in the wall of sound. However, the overwhelming message of longing will creep off the stage and tempt audience members to succumb to the rush of images in front of them.

Tickets are \$29 for adults, \$26 for seniors (65 and older), and \$12 for students with a valid I.D. A \$3 service fee per ticket will be applied at time of purchase. Group discounts are available for parties of four or more. Purchase tickets online at beckcenter.org or call Customer Service at 216-521-2540 x10. [Beck Center for the Arts](#) is located at 17801 Detroit Avenue in Lakewood.



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