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Posted: Mon., Jan. 12, 2009, 6:00pm PT

Cranked

(The Duke on 42nd St.; 299 seats; \$25 top) A New Victory Presentation of a solo show in one act by Michael P. Northey, with music and beats by Kyprios and Stylust, lyrics by Kyprios and Northey. Directed by Patrick McDonald.

With: Kyle Cameron.

By [SAM THIELMAN](#)

If you must make a show about drugs, and you have to market it to teenagers, "Cranked" is the way to do it. Green Thumb Theater's brief one-man play exhumes the horrors of meth addiction without pandering or moralizing, and its star, Kyle Cameron, is wonderfully convincing as a good kid with problems who becomes a sad-sack tweaker. The show's most interesting assets, however, are hip-hop artists Kyprios and Stylust, who flesh out Michael P. Northey's script with weirdly catchy songs about addiction and death. "Mary Poppins" it ain't, but it sure keeps your attention.

"The difference between the old zombie movies and the new ones is the speed at which the zombies move," observes Stan (Cameron) by way of introduction. Stan favors the new movies, reasoning that if cannibal zombies are that crazy about the taste of long pork, they'll definitely hurry to get to it. And Stan can relate, it turns out -- he's having a "Dawn of the Dead" of his very own, but instead of brains, he's hungry for crystal meth.

It's hard to create a show like "Cranked" without having a "Reefer Madness" moment or two (the original scare film, not the musical). But because of their drug of choice, Green Thumb rarely steps over the line in terms of what kinds of crazy things people in thrall to meth will do. Parts of the story are depressingly familiar, in fact: a kid starts doing drugs so he can stop worrying about his divorced parents and then becomes so heavily addicted he steals, begs and ends up homeless -- all in the service of fueling his addiction.

What keeps the play interesting is Stan's might-be career: just before he starts sliding into the abyss, our hero wins a recording contract at a freestyle battle, earning a little respect and a lot of money and maybe a way out of his dead-end life. Whenever the show starts to sag into familiar territory, Stan takes on his hip-hop alter ego, Definition, and out comes a clever rhyme by Kyprios and a great-sounding mix by DJ Jason Pouliot, who works the turntables.

"I'm the truth, and you a bad impression/I'm a statement, you wack suggestion/I'm Definition, the definitive answer to the question," he snarls. And with the nicely introspective Cameron playing the part, you can see the good this kind of bravado does for a damaged teenager.

Happy endings are an almost inevitable downside of youth theater, and "Cranked" succumbs to the temptation to make everything turn out all right. It's probably just as well, since nobody wants to see Stan die, but the climactic moment in which his inattentive dad redeems himself is a little much.

Still, "Cranked" has more to say than "this is your brain on drugs," especially since it seems to be part of a vanguard of boundary-breaking acts (like Danny Hoch's "Taking Over") moving hip-hop theater into the mainstream in recent months. It's heartening to see poetry, theater, and mass culture keeping such close company.

Set, Justus Hayes; lighting, Martin Conboy; sound, Joel Etkin; DJ, Jason Pouliot; production stage manager, Rachel King. Opened Jan. 9, 2009. Reviewed Jan. 11. Running time: 50 MIN.

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TM Reviews

Cranked

Reviewed By: [Barbara & Scott Siegel](#) · Jan 12, 2009 · New York

Michael P. Northey's smartly written [Cranked](#), now at the Duke on 42nd Street, is a cautionary solo show about the dangers of crystal methadone. As one can tell, this is not the kind of fare one expects as a New Victory Theatre offering, which usually produces lighter family-friendly fare. And placing this intense 45-minute show in the confines of the more intimate Duke smartly allows this show, which uses Hip Hop and spoken word to sell its message, a real chance to flourish.



Kyle Cameron in *Cranked*
(© David Cooper)

A worthwhile experience for both teens -- as well as somewhat older theatergoers -- *Cranked* is the fictional story of a young man named Stan (Kyle Cameron) waiting in the wings of a freestyle Hip Hop competition about to make his comeback after hitting rock bottom as crystal meth addict. Before going on to perform in the present, however, the play dives into a flashback of rhythm and rhyme.

Going by the handle of "Definition," Stan was a teenage phenomenon who had won a record contract with a sizable advance. He squandered his money and his future -- but most injuriously his health -- when he got hooked on crystal meth. Using monster movies (particularly zombie films) as a metaphor for what the drug did to him, Stan details his rapid, shocking decline.

Indeed, the piece doesn't sugarcoat the truth about this horrible addiction. Stealing from his family, hallucinations, sleeping on the street, and a sort of self-induced physical torture all come into play. When he describes how he would scrape his scabs and smoke them because his skin had enough crystal meth in it to get him high, you know you're hearing a tale told from hell. Using conventional music by Kyrios and Stylust and

compelling lyrics by Kyprious and Northey, Stan's story manages to sidestep melodrama while at the same time avoiding a preachy tone.

The brevity of the play works in tandem with director Patrick McDonald's spare, fast-paced style. Neither the lighting design by Martin Conboy nor the set design by Justus Hayes attempt to glorify Stan's drug abuse by adding extra glitz to the proceedings; instead they underscore his emotional and physical pain. By the same token, the show's all-important sound design by Joel Etkin is not so much rock-concert loud as it is pointed and powerful.

Best of all, Cameron is an appealing, wholesome looking young man, who manages to be doubly impressive as a Hip Hop artist. He's an actor we'll surely be seeing more of in the future.

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THEATRE



Cranked

BY CHRISTOPHER HOILE April 24, 2008 18:04

CRANKED

Featuring Kyle Cameron.

Written by Michael P.

Northey. Music by Kyprios &

Stylust. Directed by Patrick

McDonald. Presented by

Green Thumb Theatre. To

May 3. Mon-Thu 10:15am,

1pm; Mon-Fri 10:15am; Sat

2pm; Sun 2pm, 4pm (times

may vary). \$20; \$15

seniors/18 and under.

Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for

Young People, 165 Front E.

416-862-2222. www.lktyp.ca.

Green Thumb Theatre of Vancouver is currently presenting its powerful hip-hop show *Cranked* at the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People. Aimed at an audience aged 13 and up, the 45-minute play by Michael P. Northey with music by Vancouver MC Kyprios and beats by producer Geoff "Stylust" Reich tells the tale of the rise, fall and rise of Stan, a fictional freestyle rapper known as "definition." The cause of his fall is his addiction to a form of crystal meth called "crank."

The show has been touring and winning raves from teens ever since its creation in 2006. This would never happen if it fell into the pitfall of preachiness that ruins so many cautionary tales. Instead, Northey keeps the focus simply on Stan. We meet him backstage at the first freestyle rapping competition he's entered since completing rehab. As he tries to convince himself he can go on without his usual fix, he re-enacts the descending lows in his life that followed his one success when he won a competition and a record deal. A domineering, adulterous father; his parents' divorce; and insensitive teachers are all brought forth as sources of his dissatisfaction, but he knows he worked out those problems through rap. Instead, the immediate cause of his downfall was his first hit of meth when "he saw God" — a high that happened once and never came back no matter how much he used. Eventually, he's sleeping on the streets, stealing for drug money and, since meth stays in the skin, eating his own scabs to get high.

Eminem-like Kyle Cameron gives a knock-out performance taking his character through a greater emotional arc in 45 minutes you see in most full-length plays. We see him as an ordinary, rebellious 17-year-old who uses rhyme to organize his life. We also see him in withdrawal, convulsed with gestural tics, hallucinating and feeling like a zombie from the horror movies he loves. In a brilliant contrast he replays a contest he lost playing both the preening MC who wins and himself as a paranoid wreck who can't stand people watching him. This scene alone blasts any myth that meth enhances performance. The end is not a Hollywood

triumph against all odds to win the title. Rather we cheer Stan on just because he's won back the strength to compete. So caught up in the story is the audience by the end, they all clap in time to his last song "Stand Up" because he's clean.

Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEKLY.COM

625 Church St, 6th Floor, Toronto M4Y 2G1

NOW Magazine

Theatre Reviews

Cranked way up

Jon Kaplan

CRANKED (Lorraine Kimsa). To May 3. 416-862-2222. See listings.

Rating: NNNN

Meet Stan, aka Definition, the freestyle MC who loves horror movies and moving to the rhythm of his own rhyming talent.

Oh, yeah, and crystal meth.

Cranked, Michael P. Northey's work about a teen whose zest for life narrows down to the necessity of the next fix, lasts a mere 45 minutes. But in the hands of actor Kyle Cameron and director Patrick McDonald - and with music and beats by Kyprios and Stylust, DJ'd by Bee Side (Evan Brenner) - the show is equally riveting and scary.

It follows Stan's year-long arc from secure, confident freestyle DJ to twitchy, hallucinating wreck who thinks of nothing but a score's anticipated high. Playing all the characters in the show, Cameron creates family members, competitors and counsellors, morphing like a chameleon from one to another.

But we never lose sight of Stan, who aptly compares his need for a hit to a zombie's lust for flesh. Looking back just before he goes into another competition, Stan knows he's gone from "king of the hill to bottom of the barrel," unable to capture the feeling of that first high.

We watch the meltdown happen in this cold, uncompromising story, and see Stan start to take control of his life again. Importantly, Cranked doesn't preach, but instead shows us what the central character goes through and lets us draw our own conclusions.

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GLOBE & MAIL - Wed. April 30, 2008

Picking at the scab of meth addiction

J. KELLY NESTRUCK

From Wednesday's Globe and Mail

April 30, 2008 at 4:19 AM EDT

CRANKED

Written by Michael P. Northey

Music/beats by Kyrios

and Stylust

Directed by Patrick McDonald

Performed by Kyle Cameron

At the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre

for Young People in Toronto

As Cranked opens, Stan, a young hip-hop MC, is comparing the slow, lumbering zombies of old movies to the speedier ones of today's horror flicks. To him, the modern running undead seem more realistic: "When you crave flesh ... When it is the sole thing in the universe that you can focus on and you want it as bad as your next breath of air? Oh yeah, you will run."

Stan knows of what he speaks: He was a zombie once, one of those legions of blank-eyed addicts you pass on the street. The flesh he craved was crystal meth, that particularly insidious form of methamphetamine whose known aliases include ice, tina, glass, p, jib and - as in the title of this play - crank. Now, he has kicked

the drug and is preparing backstage for his first freestyle competition since getting clean.

Created by British Columbia-based Green Thumb Theatre, Cranked is a musical written by Michael P. Northey with beats by a pair of hip-hop artists known as Kyprios and Sylust. Northey's slang seems up-to-date and his metaphors - like the zombie one - are well chosen for the young audiences this piece is intended for.

In between monologues, Stan - played by Kyle Cameron - charts his descent into addiction using rap, while as DJ Evan Brenner spins up on the balcony. Some of Stan's freestyle battles are dramatized, and he affectingly uses rhyme to finally open up to his drug counsellor.

In one flashback to the classroom - the timeline can get a bit confusing - Stan delivers a rap about how his father the tool salesman, who left his mother, is in fact a tool himself, instead of submitting an essay he was supposed to write about what his parents do for a living.

He gets sent to the principal's office, the only moment in the play that feels untrue. I suspect most public-school teachers these days would give him extra marks for creativity - or at least cut some slack to a student clearly having trouble at home. Still, when you're presenting theatre to teens, it doesn't hurt to get them onside by positioning teachers as the enemy.

Cameron is not a rapper by trade, but does a respectable job of impersonating one. He is excellent, however, at contorting his wiry frame to depict "tweaking," the compulsive twitching and picking at the skin that goes along with meth addiction. (Reminding me a bit of David Dawson's performance in Nicholas Nickleby; is it possible Smike was a meth-head?) Cameron is also quick to develop a rapport with his teenage audience, even challenging in character a kid or two who tried to squirm out of engaging with the piece through ironic laughter. The audience seemed comfortable relating to him. After the show I saw, one girl asked: How do you know if your pot is laced with

meth? (The answer: You don't.) While Cranked never condescends, one of the websites Cameron referred the teens to during the Q&A session - an American site called staycrystalclear.com - was less useful, equating as it does drinking and smoking marijuana with using harder drugs. If you get as hysterical about beer and pot as you do about heroin and crystal meth, kids will write it all off as crying wolf.

The rise of meth use among teens across Canada is no joke, however.

Cranked doesn't shy away from the most disturbing elements. When Stan talks about picking at and eating his own scabs because of the chemical residue in them, the image burnt itself into my mind. If this was the case for others in the audience as well, then the play has done its job.

Cranked is at Toronto's Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People until Saturday, then touring through New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and British Columbia. (information: <http://www.greenthumb.bc.ca>).

Gritty addiction tale enthralls

April 23, 2008

RICHARD OUZOUNIAN
THEATRE CRITIC

Cranked

★★★★ (out of 4)

By Michael P. Northey. Directed by Patrick McDonald. Until May 3 at Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People, 165 Front St. E. **416-862-2222**



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Kyle Cameron isn't afraid to show his scars as Stan, the crystal meth-addicted rapper in 'Cranked.' Geared to a teenage audience, the play opened April 22.

Want to learn how a 16-year-old can go from being "king of the hill to bottom of the barrel" in just one year?

Then make what will prove to be an informative, frightening, yet still entertaining visit to *Cranked*, which opened at the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People yesterday afternoon.

This show from Vancouver's Green Thumb Theatre about teenage addiction to crystal meth has been a big hit on the West Coast and it deserves an equal reaction here.

I saw it with a packed house of mid-teens, who can be the most critical of audiences, but they were held every minute, cheering loudly at the end.

The major reason is that this is a show that not only walks the walk, but talks the talk. Thanks to Michael P. Northey's exceptionally idiomatic script, as well as the music/beats laid down by Kyprios and Stylust, a young audience doesn't feel condescended to and is able to connect perfectly.

The story they're relating to is that of a kid named Stan, who raps under the name Definition. He struck it big just after his 16th birthday with a record deal, instant fame and tons of money. But shortly after, he discovered crystal meth and the money vanished, along with his health, his family life, a lot of his brain and – almost – his life.

We meet him at 17, after months in rehab, when he's trying to make a comeback. In the

course of his backstage pre-show jitters, we learn all about what brought him to this place. Most of it is cleverly done in the first rap he ever wrote in Grade 9, for a teacher who demanded he turn in an essay about what his father did for a living.

With the baby grooves and halting rhymes of the embryonic rapper, we learn about a life that gave "empty" a new meaning, but the brilliance of the sequence is that we see Stan using his repressed inner feelings to fuel his growing art.

Kyle Cameron is awesome here playing Stan, as he is throughout the whole 45-minute show. He's not afraid to show us the disgusting physical side of his addiction, picking at sores both real and imaginary, while wiping away a cold sweat that never seems to vanish no matter how hard he tries.

His dementia is equally convincing, with some of his hallucinations proving so deeply felt that when we later find out they were false, we're as relieved as we are surprised.

The performer and the script have taken us through hell, which is why the hopeful ending may seem a bit on the artificial side, but one would like to think that anyone who sees *Cranked* would be terrified enough by its portrait of crystal meth to keep far away from it in the first place.

Mad props to LKTYP artistic director Allen MacInnis for making a show this important and tough available to our city's students.