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Tex pistols

The Austin-based Rude Mechanicals company brings "Lipstick Traces," the slightly fanciful history of punk and its centuries-old roots, to the New York stage.

By **CARAID O'BRIEN**_

There is life in theater outside the Big City. "Lipstick Traces" (yes, yes, the book), a new show from the Rude Mechanicals out of Austin, Texas, rocks New York. A dramatization of the cult classic by Greil Marcus, the script chronicles the rise of punk music and its influences throughout the centuries, which include the Christian reactionary John of Leydon in the 16th century, the Dadaists of 1916 and the French Lettrist and Situationist movements of the 1950s.

Directed by Shawn Sides of the Rude Mechs for New York's Obie-award-winning Foundry Theatre, the 75-minute show moves with lightning speed throughout the centuries. John of Leydon = Johnny Rotten aka Johnny Lydon — get it? Kirk Lynn's author-sanctioned (and praised) dramatization of the book is clever — it works.

You won't take your eyes off James Urbaniak, in a fetching bowl haircut, as he leads the cast through the famous Dada performance at the Cafe Voltaire. David Greenspan is superflash as the shiny-suited Malcolm McLaren, the self-proclaimed motor behind the Sex Pistols. Jason Leibrecht as Johnny Rotten (did you know he was half Irish?) will make the bellies of even mild punk fans flutter (oh, his tattered clothes!). In fact, the entire cast goes fabulously rockstar when acting out the naughty Sex Pistols interview on British television.

Less interesting are the scenes regarding the French Lettrists and Situationists who manufactured events and operated under the slogan "Don't Work," although the history-lesson aspect of this section is informative. The piece is framed, explained and annotated by Dr. Narrator, a generic, earnest, American doctoral candidate played by Lana Lesley. This role is not as defined or compelling as the historical portraits and lends an annoying stridency to an otherwise fascinating and entertaining evening.