



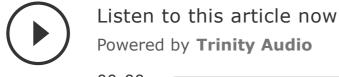
Buffalo performance group Francis Bacon Experiment ensures that 'Rocky Horror' lives on

Ellen E. Mintzer Oct 17, 2022 🔍 0



John Kehoe, the founder of the Francis Bacon Experiment, plays Dr. Frank-N-Furter in front of the screen showing actor Tim Curry in the same role in the 1975 film "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." Courtesy Francis Bacon Experiment





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ocky Night" is Jamie Nablo's favorite night of the year.

The current cast director of the **Francis Bacon Experiment**, a Buffalobased group that performs interactive "shadowcasts" for screenings of the movie "Rocky Horror Picture Show" every October, explained that "Rocky Night" is traditionally the Friday before Halloween.

Nablo's husband, Ryan Kaminski, who plays the Brad to her Janet in the FBE "Rocky" cast, proposed to her on Rocky Night 2018. They were on stage at North Tonawanda's Riviera Theatre, where FBE has produced its interactive screenings annually since 2007 (excluding 2020 and 2021, when the pandemic necessitated the use of other venues). The drag queen emceeing the show handed Kaminski the microphone, and he proposed in front of 1,100 cheering audience members.

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"It was awesome," Kaminski said. "We were surrounded by friends, and we had family in the audience that night."

FBE was named after founder John Kehoe's cat and functions as an umbrella term for his various artistic pursuits. The group's shadowcasting involves performers acting out every gesture and movement in front of a screen while the film plays.





The Francis Bacon Experiment acts out or "shadowcasts" "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" at special screenings. In the picture, you can see Jamie Nablo and her husband Ryan Kaminski standing in front of the 1975 film as they act out a scene with Susan Sarandon and Barry Bostwick. Photo by Katherine Butler

The group's shadowcasting continues a long-standing tradition with "Rocky Horror Picture Show" that started shortly after the 1975 musical parody premiered. In the film, Susan Sarandon and Barry Boswick play sweethearts who get stuck in a storm at the mansion of Dr. Frank-N-Furter (Tim Curry) with a house of strange characters. Though the film initially didn't do well, it became a midnight movie sensation and cult classic when audience members started to act out scenes, singing along to songs such as "The Time Warp," and dressing as characters.

In addition to "Rocky at the Riv," the FBE cast has performed across the northeast United States and produced expanded "Rocky Horror"-adjacent programming since Kehoe handed Nablo the reins in 2020. So far in October, FBE hosted a "Rocky Horror" trivia night and a screening of another horror-musical-comedy cult film, "Phantom of the Paradise."

On Oct. 22, FBE will team up with local burlesque troupe the Glam Vamps for a brunch show at **Community Beer Works** (520 7th St.). And on Oct. 28, the troupe returns to Riviera Theatre to shadowcast the film there for the first time since 2019.

Kehoe, who plays Frank-N-Furter, and Nablo are certain that they will cry when they return to the Riv. It will be an emotional experience with their cast, an ever-growing chosen family.

"The minute we bring somebody in, they're just welcomed so quickly," Nablo said. "They become part of our family, and they become some of our best friends that we can lean on and reach out to. It's really heartwarming."

Kaminski echoed that sentiment.

"Really, for me, it's the community aspect of it that keeps me coming back and keeps our cast growing," he said.

Nablo has been passionate about "Rocky Horror Picture Show" since age 5. A VHS copy of the film was the first thing she bought with her own money, and she watched it on repeat in her childhood bedroom. She still has the tape.

"It's a special movie," Nablo said. "It's not a good movie by any means. It's a terrible movie, but there's something about it that just draws you to it."

Kehoe felt a similar attraction to the film from a young age. He noted that the communal energy of screenings creates a singular experience.

"If you yell lines back at it, you throw your toilet paper, you go to a theater that's full of crazies who are doing all the same things, you get up and dance through part of the movie, that's what makes it so much fun," Kehoe said.

The growth of FBE's programming has allowed the cast to experiment with different roles and forms of expression. The brunch show with Glam Vamps is one example.

"There's no screen, so the charisma of the performers will really take center stage," Kaminski said.

The artists will perform iconic songs from the film like "The Time Warp" as well as original Rocky-inspired numbers. Nablo said they were still finalizing the set list, but planned to include songs from Rocky sequel "Shock Treatment" and a song inspired by that other notorious cult favorite "The Room." The Glam Vamps will be devising original material that will potentially include a "Barbarella" tribute and a Magenta and Columbia duet.

Nablo's vision for the group's future includes holiday-themed "Rocky" screenings and shadowcasts of "The Room" and "The Princess Bride." At the end of the day, though, there's no place like "Rocky Horror."

"I really wanted to have a place where if this show is screening, you're going to have a safe space to just go and be yourself," Nablo said. "Whether you want to dress up, whether you just want to scream at the screen and let out some internalized rage, whatever you want to do, it's a place where you can go and have fun and be comfortable in yourself. Rocky means family, and there's no wrong way to Rocky."

PREVIEW

Francis Bacon Experiment

Oct. 22: **Brunch show** featuring burlesque, drag and shadowcast-style performances with the Glam Vamps at **Community Beer Works** (520 7th St.). Doors open at 11

a.m., show is at noon. Cost is \$10; food and drink is extra. The film will not be shown.

Oct. 28: **"Rocky at the Riv: 'Rocky Horror Picture Show' Party."** Starts at 10 p.m. at the Riviera Theatre (67 Webster St., North Tonawanda) with performances by the Eye Candy Vixens Burlesque and the Ladies of Illusion, followed by audience costume contest. An interactive screening of the movie with the Francis Bacon Experiment starts at midnight. Cost is \$20 to \$35.



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