

January 23, 2008

**THEATRE » PUSH INTERNATIONAL PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL****THE BLACK RIDER**

★★★★½

All is manic and gruesome in the November Theatre production of this acid trip with a moral. Tom Waits and William S. Burroughs penned its twisted musical numbers, and Kevin Corey, playing a frail young dreamer who just wants to marry his sweetheart, leads an outstanding ensemble.

Wilhelm (Corey's character) is prevented from marrying so long as he remains a dandy who prefers poetry to slaughtering woodland creatures. A deal with the devil, though, allows him to become a stupendous huntsman, guaranteeing his virile image.

Like all Faustian bargains, this one sours. In a spree of gnashing



**Michael Scholar in the Faustian tale *The Black Rider*. IAN JACKSON**

teeth and writhing hands, the cast of *The Black Rider* uses a dark sort of clowning, an extreme theatricality, to express Wilhelm's dank psychic journey. In black, red and white, the Edmonton-sprung production is so tightly designed and so fiercely energetic, you'll hardly notice that the play doesn't stop for intermission. To Feb. 9.

\$30 to \$41. Granville Island Stage, 1585 Johnston, St., 604-687-1644.

» Michael Harris