ASPIRING FILMMAKERS DON’T NEED BIG BUCKS, says Michigan State University alumna Betsy Baker, best known as queen of gore in the shoestring-budget film “Evil Dead.” Baker (BA, Theatre, 1977) returned to campus for the October 15, 2010, musical debut of the 1970s cult classic. Nor do they need to jet to New York City or Los Angeles to launch their careers, says Baker. Michigan’s burgeoning film industry offers the resources to take center stage.

Those are the two key messages Baker communicated to students while attending their movement and makeup classes, hosting acting workshops and riding on the “Evil Dead: The Musical” Homecoming float this past October. She also hosted a public acting workshop and a free screening of the “Evil Dead” film.

“Betsy was able to give people a very clear idea of the entrepreneurial spirit behind that first movie, the same spirit that can inspire the people of Michigan,” said Rob Roznowski, director of “Evil Dead: The Musical,” produced by the MSU Department of Theatre. “She was able to talk about the process of making the movie; the process of finding funding; and the process of being smart in finding ways to shoot.”

Baker, who grew up in St. Joseph, MI, played Linda in “Evil Dead,” which was written by former MSU student Sam Raimi. In the campy independent film, five MSU students escape from reality to a cabin in the woods, only to be faced with demons and death.

Both the musical and the movie offer a brilliant mix of humor and horror, Roznowski says. And it took blood, sweat and tears by a scrappy young cast to make it that way, says Baker.

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“It just goes to prove that hot meals, hot coffee, a fancy trailer – none of that is necessary,” Baker says. “When you believe, the opportunities are boundless. But to be successful – whether in set design, light design, costumes or acting – students should be well-rounded.

“A good actor needs to take acting classes, scene building classes, movement classes and get all the experience he or she can. They should engage in social relationships – all things I did while at MSU. And they should do their homework. So much more is available today, so they need to network and market like crazy.”

Baker, who worked for years in Detroit and credits the city for much of her career, believes independent films and independent film festivals are still important pieces of the entertainment landscape.

“Evil Dead: The Musical” ran October 15-17 and October 20-24 at Wharton Center’s Pasant Theatre. A side-splitting musical spoof based on Raimi’s popular cult horror films, the story line follows five college students spending spring break in an abandoned cabin in the woods where they unleash an ancient evil all the while singing hilarious musical numbers. Blood, guts, gore...and dancing! Plus, for an additional charge, audience members could sit in the “splatter section”!

Now, that’s entertainment!