

## Abbamemnon

Troubadour Theater Company at Falcon Theatre

Reviewed by Dink O'Neal



Monica Schneider and cast mates  
Photo by Richard Johnson

They're baaaack! Capitalizing on an intimate knowledge of their skewered source material and banking on the troupe's ability to handle dramatic intensity as nimbly as it does the satirical side of things, the Troubadours present a piece deliciously reminiscent of 2007's *OthE.L.O.* In bringing to life Aeschylus's complicated mythological tragedy *Agamemnon*, the company floods the stage with no shortage of gore and human depravity—balanced this time, via Troubadour's signature recipe, by the musical catalogue of the famed Swedish pop group, ABBA.

It's a successful symbiosis concocted by adaptor-director Matt Walker. Wisely, Walker has peopled his production with performers whose backgrounds boast both the serious and the silly. A tight-knit core of Troubadour regulars expertly handles the lion's share of the dramatic sections, while the entire cast rocks out to each of ABBA's recycled goodies. And can this group ever dance, knocking it out of the park in particular with choreographer Molly Alvarez's zombie-like interpretation of "I'm a

Marionette.”

Nearly stopping the show, though, before it even begins is perhaps the most ingenious preshow announcement/curtain speech in the group’s history, set to “Take a Chance on Me.” And with the introduction of each character, the audience is treated to yet another of the tunes that kept the Stockholm foursome atop the charts from 1975 through 1982.

Beth Kennedy’s city watchman sets the tone as expository speeches abound throughout Walker’s easily followed compilation of numerous translations of Aeschylus’s original script. Walker and Monica Schneider as the titular monarch and his scheming wife, Clytemnestra, are a “Dancing King/Queen” to be reckoned with. In particular, Schneider does a remarkable job delivering the lengthy explanation to Rob Nagle’s acerbically dry Greek Chorus Leader as to how a series of bonfires relayed the results of the assault on Troy. Along with some pretty nifty moves, she rounds out her display of triple-threat talents by giving more than ample song-stylings to her version of “SOS.”

Returning from the Trojan War, Abhamemnon discovers his betrothed in the arms of his duplicitous cousin, Aegisthus, played by the outrageously unpredictable Rick Batalla. Never one to pass up the chance to milk a “bit,” at the show reviewed he was in rare form as improvisational “licks” flew fast and furious. So much so, that, goaded by the opening-night audience, Walker threw the company’s dreaded “yellow penalty flag” on Batalla for having bobbled a section of actual scripted dialogue. It’s one of those “Troubie” moments one always hopes will happen.

Katherine Donahoe, playing the confiscated Cassandra, one of Abhamemnon’s spoils of war, is downright chilling as she prophesies the coming calamity that will be visited upon the house of her captor. Conversely, Joseph Keane’s Herald, bisected by an 8-foot spear, provides laughs galore as he returns from the battle to impart how everything went down on the front lines.

Along the way, anachronistic references to the 405 Freeway construction issues, the Taliban, the Clippers, and even the missing Malaysian Airliner abound. An upstage overhead projector is employed so that hand and shadow puppets can lay out some of the backstory. Scenic and puppet designer Matt Scott has crafted a scene-stealing quartet of oversized floating heads occupying the stage left Chorus area. And lastly, kudos galore to musical director Eric Heinly and his band members, especially cellist Ginger Murphy, for supporting the proceedings so flawlessly.