



Review: DURAN DURANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA at Troubadour Theater At The Colony

Zaniness along the Nile courtesy of the Troubadour Theater Company

By: Evan Henerson Jun. 12, 2024



"I have immortal longings in me," the Queen of the Nile famously orates shortly before her date with an asp toward the end of Shakespeare's ANTONY & CLEOPATRA. Well, the hourglass of Cleopatra's life is running out when this line is uttered, and if southland theater-goers want to see what hay the Troubadour Theater Company is making out of A&C and the music of Duran Duran, the window to do so is a brief one. On June 16, the mayhem comes to an end, and watching [Matt Walker](#), [Beth Kennedy](#), [Mike Sulprizio](#) and the gang play around in Rome and Egypt will be a splendid way for some Troubie and Duran Duran fanciers to spend Father's Day.

Since the late 90s, this crazy company has been mixing up the plots of Shakespeare plays with the song catalogs of various pop stars, usually with a summer performance or – more frequently in recent years – a holiday-themed show. As they've taken to mixing in Greek classics with their Bard and yuletide offerings, the Troubies haven't birthed a new Shakespeare-pop offering since 2019's JULIUS WEEZER.

The Bard is back and DURAN DURANTHONY & CLEOPATRA is up to snuff, zaniily on point both in its concept and execution. All those new wavy pop songs of the 80s and 90s (mostly the 80s) have been mixed into Shakespeare's *other* tale of forbidden love. Not sure what sparks the mind of company adaptor/director **Matt Walker** and the company in coming up with these gems, but "Her name is Cleo, and she dances on the sand," makes for a pretty rock-solid foundation on which to build.

Part of the fun of any Troubie show is anticipating where and how the next pop hit is going to be incorporated into the action. Although the off-script bits can get a little lazy, when it comes to pop-Bard hybridization, Walker and his company know exactly what they're doing. And the manner in which they bring non-company members into the action is especially inventive. Or maybe these more saps dragooned into, say, captaining a sea voyage, are actually Troubie audience plants. Who cares! It's a gas.

ANTHONY & CLEOPATRA is a political tragedy about empire building brought low by an ill-conceived romance. DURANTHONY largely distills things down to the political wranglings between Antony (played by Walker, also the director) and Octavius Caesar (**Rick Batalla**) on one hand and the Antony-Cleo (Chloie Wyatt Taylor) assignation on the other. Some of A&C's other players put in appearance – here an Enobarbus, there a Pompey – but love, lust, and war – and of course the union of the snake – top the agenda here.

Props, there are many. **Suzanne Jolie** Narbonne (also an ensemble member and one of three credited choreographers) outfits these "wild boy" Romans and sultry Egyptians in an array of colorful togas and gowns, the more er, revealing, the better (especially for the men). There be beer pong, a nerf gun battle, an outsized spear upon which **Beth Kennedy's** unfortunate messenger is creatively impaled and a very clever snake-in-the-box for Cleo (and the rest of the ensemble's) final act.

There can be a line to tread when one is tasked with shuttling between the straight parts of Shakespeare's text and the camp. Walker's Antony handles most of the more serious beats which, admittedly, don't last long nor weigh down the revelry. You won't shed too many a tear for Antony's spurned wife, not after Philip McNiven's vampy and campy Octavia discovers fresher and more willing meat in her own brother, Octavius Caesar. Accompanied by self-generated intro music, Batalla's mincing Caesar pilfers every scene he enters.

Burbank's Colony Theatre, the home of the Troubies' last few holiday shows, is a plum venue for shenanigans, a wide stage with good sightlines, some nice video capability and plenty of room for Ryan Whyman's on-stage Troubadorchestra. The production has plenty of merriment with its videos, depicting scene-establishing locales that are specifically Egypt ("not Las Vegas") or Rome ("not the Getty Villa").

It's unfortunate that the Troubie's summer revelry should come to an end before summer has properly begun. If the Theatricum Botanicum and Independent Shakespeare Company can string out their Shakespearean seasons over a month or more, a pity it is that Duranthy and Cleo can't sing, dance, pun their way across Egypt a little longer.

*Photo of **Matt Walker**, **Rick Batalla** and **Cloie Wyatt Taylor** by **Eddy Will**.*