

Anita W. Harris

Troubadours get no-no-notorious with ‘Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra’

The Troubadour Theater Company doesn't miss a beat with its latest music-meets-classic story mashup, “Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra,” continuing at the Colony Theatre through June 16.

Blending the songs of 1980s boy-band Duran Duran with William Shakespeare’s tragic play “Antony and Cleopatra,” the Troubies (as they are familiarly known since first performing for local audiences in 1995) entertain not just with a punny take on a troubled play but lively singing and choreography, dressed in short togas, big hair and rad ‘80s makeup.



From left: Matt Walker (Antony), Rick Batalla (Octavius) and Cloie Wyatt Taylor (Cleopatra) in Troubadour Theater Company's "Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra" at Colony Theatre (Photo by Eddy Will)

A totally awesome on-stage “Troubadorchestra” – featuring Mike Abraham on guitar, Carlos Rivera on bass, Kevin Stevens on drums, and music director Ryan Whyman on piano – along

with (ahem) borrowed video images, transport us to Egypt, Rome and the waters in between as a regal love affair turns deadly.

An ominous soothsayer (Mark McCracken) introduces the story before we meet Cleopatra (a lark-voiced Cloie Wyatt Taylor), queen of Egypt, heralded by a bouncy “Her name is Cleo” to the tune of Duran Duran’s “Rio.”

The full cast of nearly a dozen engages in intricate dance (choreography by John Paul Batista, Suzanne Jolie Narbonne and director Matt Walker, who also wrote the adaptation), setting a rollicking tone for the rest of the show.



From left: Suzanne Jolie Narbonne (Chairman), Cloie Wyatt Taylor (Cleopatra) and Katie Kitani (Iras) in Troubadour Theater Company's "Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra" at Colony Theatre (Photo by Eddy Will)

Cleo’s handmaidens Charmian (Narbonne, who also designed those radical wigs) and Iras (Katie Kitani) frolic in “Girls on Sand” (rather than film), the audience getting to join in on bouncing beachballs.

But things soon heat up as Roman ruler Mark Antony (Walker) finds out his wife Fulvia has died and he and Cleopatra start sharing vibes during a righteously slow version of “Hungry Like the Wolf.”

Meanwhile, Roman emperor Octavius (a wickedly funny Rick Batalla in a gold codpiece flashing beneath his toga) – riotously introduced with “Oct- Oct- Octavius” set to Duran Duran’s “Notorious” – wants Antony to marry Octavius’s sister Octavia (a lovely Philip McNiven in soft-bodied, lingerie drag).



From left: Rick Batalla (Octavius) and Matt Walker (Antony) in Troubadour Theater Company's "Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra" at Colony Theatre (Photo by Eddy Will)

Jealousy flares as a busy messenger (the hilariously straight-faced Beth Kennedy) tries to keep her curly-haired head while delivering dispatches between Rome and Egypt, at one point convincing the audience that there is a spear driven right through her body and it's not method acting.

Love then turns to war as Nerf bullets fly (no doubt keeping stage manager Corey Lynn Womack busy resetting after every show), along with puns, running jokes, audience jabs, innuendos and sight gags (including a game of beer pong that gets freeze-framed with the ball miraculously aloft in mid-air).



From left: Cloie Wyatt Taylor (Cleopatra) and Mark McCracken (Soothsayer) in Troubadour Theater Company's "Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra" at Colony Theatre (Photo by Eddy Will)

While all this may sound cheesy on paper, the troupe's impeccably sharp timing and alchemically funny interactions – all while relating a Shakespearean tragedy – elevate their endeavor to high art. It's also mega fun.

Don't miss this show if you can help it, if for no other reason than to hear your favorite Duran Duran numbers – including "A View to a Kill," "The Reflex," "Is There Something I Should Know" and "Save a Prayer" – all sung tongue-in-cheek by Southern California's most masterful and mischievous minstrels.