



EVERYBODY'S GOT ONE

CURRENT REVIEWS

From TRAVIS MICHAEL HOLDER

Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra

"Critics are men who watch a battle from a high place then come down and shoot the survivors"

- Ernest Hemingway

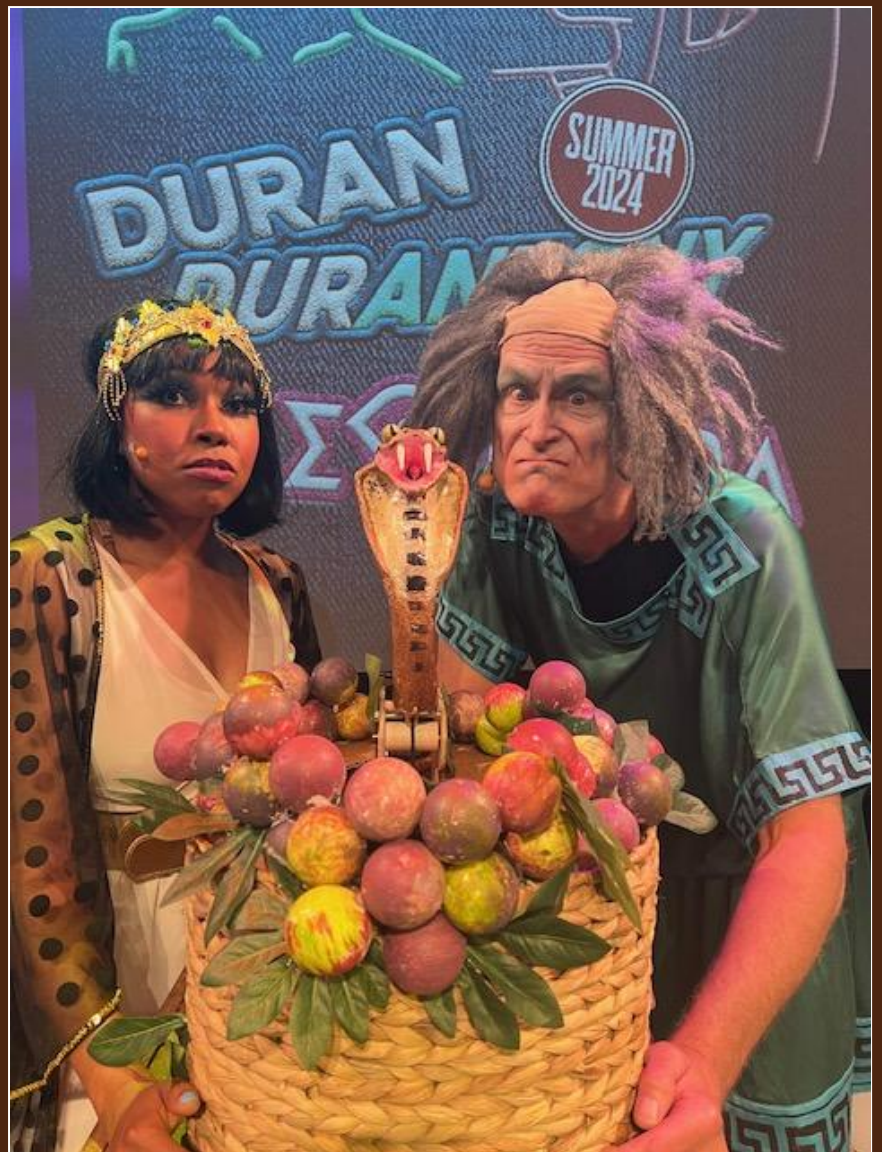


Photo by Eddy Will

Colony Theatre

Let's face it: the holidays aren't the holidays without the Troubies. The beloved Troubadour Theater Company, which for the past two decades has kicked off the season in Los Angeles like a far less annoying Mariah Carey, celebrated their 29th anniversary last December by presenting *A White (Album) Christmas*, yet another original sidesplitting and decidedly off-centered spoof of a traditional Crissmiss tale set to the music of a popular contemporary composer.

Since its inception in 1995, the Troubie's "ringmaster" Matt Walker has adapted and directed over 40 such productions, one more delightfully ridiculous than the next. Past productions have included *It's a Stevie Wonderful Life*, *Little Drummer Bowie*, *A Christmas Carole King*, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Rein-Doors*, and *Frosty the Snow-Manilow*, so the titles alone should give you a clue if you're not already a confirmed fan of their particular form of entertainment. I don't think a year has gone by when I was here in LA that whatever these guys did that year was not a part of my festivities.

Walker and his disciples knock their performances into the stratosphere year after year, selling out every show they conjure. Still, the initial success of the troupe came from their non-holiday musical matchups based on classic plays, including *Twelfth Dog Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Fever Dream*, *Romeo Hall & Juliet Oates*, *As U2 Like It*, *Julius Wheezer*, and most recently at the Getty Villa, *Lizastrata*.

Although free of fake snow and cardboard gingerbread accoutrements, these outings from Walker & Company are even more inventive, a tradition that rises to a whole new level with the Troubie's current outing now playing at the Colony, *Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra*.

More than ever, Walker has here chosen to stick to more of the Bard's original dialogue, which makes their improvised and faux-improvised asides even funnier and there's something about the cheery music of Duran Duran that makes it more hilarious—especially accented by the punctiliously rehearsed and highly energetic choreography by Walker, John Paul Batista, and Suzanne Jolie Narbonne.

Walker as Mark Antony and his longtime co-conspirator Rick Batalla as Caesar could not be better choices to meld Shakespeare with Marx Brothers-inspired slapstick, something ol' Will's comedies strived for quite shamelessly on occasion. This homage works like gangbusters with one of his most well-known tragedies originally presented in 1607, as ancient Egypt and Rome are reset somewhere closer to home and we're told that notorious pirate of the Mediterranean Pompey has claimed territory as his own from Upland to Diamond Bar (his ship is named "Pompey Sea / Pompey Doo").

The big-voiced Cloie Wyatt Taylor, most recently seen as Lizastrata herself, is wonderful as that other feminist heroine Cleopatra, Queen of Covina and West Covina (Batalla's Caesar is Emperor of Echo Park), and when she gets a little overly dramatic draped across her fainting couch, Walker is quick to remind her this is Shakespeare, not Tennessee Williams.

The ensemble is uniformly in proper Troubie mode, with two standout performances from newcomer Matt McCracken as a Lurch-like Soothsayer with some serious rocker chops and Philip McNiven as both the Friar Tuckian Lepidus and as Caesar's tit-tassel-twirling wife Octavia (a regular shopper at the Colony's adjacent Burlington Coat Factory).

As usual, a deadpanning Beth Kennedy is hysterical as a resurfacing gap-toothed messenger "more abused than a PortaPotty at Coachella"

since she keeps getting run through by spears, and both Narbonne and Katie Kitani are swell as Cleo's devoted attendants.

Mike Sulprizio's well-padded Pompey, clearly inspired by Brando's Godfather, and LA theatrical stalwart Rob Nagle as Enobarbus and that scurvy pirate Menus are also standouts, especially when Nagle delivers his croaky but spirited production number "Girls on Sand."

Musical director/keyboardist Ryan Whyman leads the excellent Troubadorchestra (Whyman, Kevin Stevens, Carlos Rivera, and Mike Abraham) and Narbonne's costuming, culled from the original designs of Sharon McGunigle, is masterfully inventive and wonderfully wacky.

Worldclass clown Matt Walker's *Duran DurAntony & Cleopatra* is a particular pleasure and a perfect distraction from the rest of the world right now. Of course, there's really nothing not to love about anything presented by this filter-free band of zanies (unless it's the ever-present arctic blast emanating from the Colony's overachieving air conditioning system) but for any ardent camp follower of the Troubies, there is one obvious thing missing this time out.

I mean, I know it's not the holiday season but... couldn't there maybe also be a *Summer Warlock*?

**THROUGH JUNE 16: Colony Theatre, 555 N. Third St., Burbank.
818.558.7000 or www.troubies.com**



(Croaky but spirited)