

Fleetwood Macbeth

by Sarah Taylor Ellis
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Lisa Valenzuela and Morgan Rusler get bloody in Fleetwood Macbeth. (Source: Chelsea Sutton)

Troubadour Theater Company's "**Fleetwood Macbeth**" may leave you wondering: why can't all jukebox musicals be this self-consciously smart and playful?

Where Broadway is plagued by woeful attempts to squeeze hit songs into coherent narratives, the Troubies successfully mash up two unlikely candidates - Fleetwood Mac and Shakespeare's Scottish play - in a delightful theatrical romp.

Since 1995, this Los Angeles-based company has adapted the classics to their own slapstick musical comedy style, rife with clever topical references. In "Fleetwood Macbeth," our tragic hero (the rousing Morgan Rusler) may already be Thane of Silverlake and Universal City - but his conniving wife plots to see him crowned king.

Backed by a chorus of sexy witches, Lady Macbeth is a bewitching Shakespearean take on Stevie Nicks, played by powerhouse performer Lisa Valenzuela. She enchants the audience with a few classic songs as she drives the plot towards Macbeth's uproariously violent demise.

Matt Walker's direction flies high on physical comedy, from a devilish lieutenant who sails about the stage in Heelys (Brandon Breault as Seyton) to a lively parade of Mick Juggers, lollygaggers, and Tea Baggerys that precede Macbeth's famous "dagger." The Troubies deftly flip through diverse accents, extend jokes to the limits of linguistic possibility, and improvise their way out of the occasional gag that falls flat.

But perhaps most notable is the company's ability to navigate these zany heights of comedy against poignant and grounded moments of Shakespearean tragedy. An ongoing joke about Macbeth's "aside light," for instance, gives way to a showstopping "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" soliloquy. Such sudden shifts from comedic flights of fancy to classical, compelling lyricism are gripping.

Sharon McGunigle's campy costumes play up each caricature, from the effeminate and purple-kilted Malcolm (Joseph Keane) to the hideously misfit witch Hecate (Beth Kennedy). Especially deserving praise is the stellar band, helmed by musical director and drummer Eric Heinly. Not only do the musicians provide crisp accompaniment for hits ranging from "Gold Dust Woman" to "You Can Go Your Own Way," but they set the tone for each scene with sound effects and witty underscoring drawing on other Fleetwood Mac classics.

Monica Schneider, Nadine Ellis, and Christine Lakin's tight ensemble dances (with the hilariously intentional exception of spastic witch Hecate) further amplify the musical numbers.

A postmodern coupling of Shakespeare and classic rock, the pulse of "Fleetwood Macbeth" is distinctly contemporary and refreshingly local. Troubadour Theater Company embraces the entire Falcon Theater as its stage and often mischievously invades the crowd, making the audience feel a welcome part of the proceedings. Fortunately, LA has embraced this clever, free-wheeling troupe of performers in return. Even gridlock on the 405 couldn't keep us away.

Performances through August 14 at the Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive in Burbank. For tickets, visit www.falcontheatre.com.