

Rockin' Laughs with Fleetwood Macbeth at the Falcon Theatre

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[1]BY TOM WALDMAN

Near the end of the Troubadour Theater Company's "Fleetwood Macbeth", at the [Falcon Theatre](#) [2] through August 14th, an uncharacteristically subdued Morgan Rusler (Macbeth) walks to the side of the stage and informs an audience that has been in hysterics for two hours that life is a "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."



[3]

'Banquo' (Matt Walker), 'Macbeth' (Morgan Rusler) and the Witches in Troubadour Theater Company's Fleetwood Macbeth playing at the Falcon Theatre. Photo by Chelsea Sutton.

Having just faithfully delivered one of the most famous speeches in all of Shakespeare, Rusler adds quickly, "and now, back to the play".

It's a moment that perfectly captures both the intent and spirit of the "Troubies" – as they seem to be known to everyone – original blend of classic Fleetwood Mac hits with the plot and best-known speeches from "Macbeth" and a slew of comedy sketches that variously reference contemporary politics, pop culture, local businesses, Valley geography, sex, and body parts.

Whenever the production veers too close to authentic Shakespeare, either the four-piece rock band plays another song or the performers go into wacky mode. Still, though this version is not designed to appeal to purists of the Bard, we never forget that without "Macbeth" there would be no "Fleetwood Macbeth."

The ability of the leads to skillfully move back and forth from Shakespeare's magnificent verse to the standard verbiage of 21st century America is critical to the show's success. The constant flow of scenes that range across times, eras, attitudes and sensibilities create a theatrical mosaic, which never seems either arch on the one hand, or disrespectful on the other. "Fleetwood Macbeth" is performed with a smile, not a smirk. In their own inimitable way, the Troubies have validated the title of a famous 1966 book by the Polish critic Jan Kott, "Shakespeare, our Contemporary."



[4]

'Lady Macbeth' (Lisa Valenzuela) and 'Macbeth' (Morgan Rusler) Photo by Chelsea Sutton.

The program does not clearly indicate who wrote the show, which suggests that many if not all the members of the group contributed something. Among the many good bits, two stood out for me; a long, rhyming digression around the word "dagger," and a final monologue in which Macbeth declares that his sins – murder, etc. – are not as bad as those committed by others, including the parties responsible for allowing a once-storied baseball franchise to slide into bankruptcy.

Along with Rusler's Macbeth, which strikes the right balance – for this version – between cunning and ridiculous, I especially enjoyed Rob Nagle's blustery Duncan, and Lisa Valenzuela's powerhouse turn as Lady Macbeth, who in the second act dresses a lot like Stevie Nicks.

The witches are a whirling, swirling delight, their always charming dance numbers choreographed by Nadine Ellis, Christine Lakin, and Monica Schneider. And without trying to mimic Fleetwood

Mac's original vocals, the Troubies do a fine job on the musical numbers.



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'Seyton' (Brandon Breault), 'Lady Macbeth' (Lisa Valenzuela) and 'Macbeth' (Morgan Rusler). Photo by Chelsea Sutton

Matt Walker's direction keeps the show moving fast, but never too fast. He allows ample time for the audience to receive and respond to one joke before going on to the next. The band, which is led by drummer and musical director Eric Heinly, plays the snappy guitar riffs, looping bass lines, and tricky Mick Fleetwood rhythms that resulted in the sale of millions and millions of albums.

The performance ends, as it must, with the song "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow"; audience members born before 1972 will recall Hillary, Bill, Tipper, and Al on stage at Madison Square Garden.

"Fleetwood Macbeth" is performed Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m., through August 14th. There is no performance the weekend of July 15th through the 17th.

Tickets are \$35-\$38, and \$27 for students. To purchase tickets, go online at www.falcontheatre.com.

www.falcontheatre.com [2] or call the box office at (818) 955-8101. The Falcon Theatre is located at 4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank.

Tom Waldman is co-author of "Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano Rock and Roll From Southern California", which had its second printing in 2009, and author of "the Best Guide to American Politics", "We All Want to Change the World: Rock and Politics From Elvis to Eminem" and "Not Much Left: The Decline of Liberalism in America". He currently serves as chief of staff to LAUSD Board Member Tamar Galatzan.