

## BWW Review: A Shakespeare Classic Gets the Rocker Treatment in Troubadour Theater Company's JULIUS WEEZER

by Ellen Dostal | May. 13, 2019



Andy Robinson (center) and the cast of Julius Weezer

In JULIUS WEEZER, Troubadour Theater Company uses its signature wit to turn a Shakespeare classic into a blissfully-alive rocker version of its ancient self, and the result is divine madness. You don't need to be a Bard lover to have a great time but, if you are, you'll be impressed by the level of classical talent on stage and the company's ability to "speak the speech" while tickling your funny bone.

Their "sublimely ridiculous" brand of theatre succeeds because they understand that to make something funny you first have to know how to play it straight. Then you can twist it, poke it, and stretch it with the kind of modern day humor that keeps audiences primed and ready for more. It's a hallmark of the Troubie style and one of many reasons their fans are so loyal.

But, back to the play. The story is *Julius Caesar* (with a couple of scenes pulled from *Antony and Cleopatra*) and the music is by Weezer, featuring revamped lyrics by **Matt Walker**, who adapted the Shakespeare and also directs, choreographs (along with

**Nadine Ellis** and **Suzanne Jolie** Narbonne), and plays Cassius. He's the glue that holds it all together, and he skillfully orchestrates the onstage machinations with a glint in his eye and a suspiciously cocked eyebrow that lets you know the wheels are always turning.



Matt Merchant and Matt Walker

Latecomers, onstage fumbles, and moments planned or unplanned all provide comedy gold in their own way. Just ask good sport **Matt Merchant** (Marcus Antonius) the hapless recipient of Walker's spit spray to the face on several successive lines, presumably accidental the first time and certainly intentional after that, or **Mike Sulprizio** (Casca) who was planted in a compromising stage pose when the cast broke out of their places to sing "Happy Birthday" to him on opening night. It calls to mind the fun of *The Carol Burnett Show* in all its glory, and this bunch is on their game from beginning to end.

That means every Troubie - and this show is packed with many longtime players - turns his or her role(s) into something unique. It doesn't matter if it is three lines and a walk across the stage (case in point, an outstanding **Morgan Rusler** as the Scottish Soothsayer and a Cinna with a distinctive gait) or a two-hour complex character like **Rob Nagle's** excellent Brutus.



L-R: Morgan Rusler, Matt Walker, Rob Nagle, Dave C. Wright, Mike Sulprizio and Rick Batalla

It's inspiring to watch Nagle move through the serious role while dressed in an above-the-knee tunic and mop top wig, purposely plopped on top of his head like the fifth Beatle, without batting an eye. By the way, all of the conspirators wear the same style of wig but with a slightly different silly variation. In a way, you could say they're the dagger-fisted precursor to today's much less dangerous boy band phenomenon. Just add blood...and eyeliner.

The absurd visuals are a show unto themselves so keep an eye out for them. Costume designer **Halei Parker** has outdone herself with the abundance of jokes built into her looks from **Andy Robinson's** costume for Caesar's death scene set to Weezer's "Undone - the Sweater Song," to **Joseph Leo Bwarie's** glitter eye shadow and Roman rock star garb as Caesar's nephew Octavius Caesar, to **Rick Batalla's** sheer pink caplet sleeves for Brutus' effeminate servant Lucius. Batalla always latches onto the more curious aspects of his characters and it helps that he has no shame. Think of him as the **Tim Conway** of the group. He doesn't even need to say anything and he's funny.



Andy Robinson and Beth Kennedy

Beth Kennedy's dramatic Calpurnia references both Cher and the Red Woman from *Game of Thrones* while her wacky version of conspirator Metellus repeatedly insists he has an assassination plan but no one will listen. Victoria Hoffman (Portia) floats innocently in on a voluminous cloud of blue chiffon with a voice as pleasing and clear as a nightingale. She's a lovely breath of fresh air within the testosterone-laden milieu. Cloie Wyatt Taylor's Cleopatra is a ballsy vixen, and the payoff for poor forgotten conspirator Trebonius (David C. Wright) is his ability to stay standing on the battlefield. Just count the swords.

But the biggest delight is how Caesar (Andy Robinson) is integrated into the scenes. Though he is the title character, he isn't usually remembered for much more than his death. Not so here. Robinson is a veteran actor who creates a formidable autocrat; smart, embittered, and just as conniving as those who would assassinate him. It is a bold take on the role, both in verbal attack and brash physicality, which gives JULIUS WEEZER a larger than life presence, one that makes sense given the bass-heavy rock 'n roll power of Weezer's music.

Songs like "Cold Dark World," "Where's My Sex," "The Greatest Man That Ever Lived" and "Brave New World," were chosen for their ability to help tell the story. It makes the score darker than normal but, in this case, that's a plus. Underscoring adds pathos to the dialogue where needed.

In the end, the Troubies spin their tale as only they can, with feet planted firmly in the text and eyes on the punchline prize.

### **JULIUS WEEZER**

May 4 - 19, 2019

Troubadour Theater Company at the El Portal Theatre

5269 Lankershim Blvd, North Hollywood, CA 91601

Tickets: 818-508-4200 or [www.elportaltheatre.com](http://www.elportaltheatre.com)



Rob Nagle, Rick Batalla and Victoria Hoffman



Matt Merchant, Joseph Leo Bwarie, and Cloie Wyatt Taylor



The cast of Julius Weezer