

Review: With ‘Julius Weezer,’ the Troubies conspire to wreak brainy mayhem

By DARYL H. MILLER MAY 14, 2019 | 1:15 PM



The conspirators of "Julius Weezer" are portrayed by, from left, Morgan Rusler, Matt Walker, Rob Nagle, Dave C. Wright, Michael Sulprizio and Rick Batalla. (Ed Krieger)

It’s 44 BC, a bit before the ides of March, and Roman citizens are in the streets singing a cheeky ode to life in the Seven Hills — to the tune of Weezer’s “Beverly Hills.”

This can mean just one thing: The mad scientists of Troubadour Theater Company have devised another mash-up of classic story and classic rock. “Julius Weezer” plays through Sunday at the El Portal in North Hollywood.

Shot through with moral ambiguity, Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" provides the troupe with particularly meaty — and ever-topical — material. The strongman title character is loved by the crowd but feared by the elite. Vowing to take him down, conspirators claim they are acting to save the republic from a dictator. Orations function like

social media, swaying the populace into opposing camps. The bracing irony of L.A. rock band Weezer cleverly complements the tale.

"Julius Weezer" is more serious than most Troubie shows, but not to worry: You'll laugh plenty.

Company leader Matt Walker adapted and directed the piece, in which Shakespeare's immortal lines get name-checked amid one-liners, topical references and lots of clown-like comedy. Performing as the conspirator Cassius, Walker also delivers some of the more Rivers Cuomo-like vocals. A band of five, led by Derick Finely, wraps the material in a thrum of bass and guitar.

Think: togas, pancake makeup, amusingly bad, bowl-cut wigs — and a cast of 13 creating brainy mayhem.

Rick Batalla, a Troubie favorite, makes hay of his role as a servant name Lucius. "It's pronounced 'luscious,'" he announces — and thereafter has a field day embodying that adjective. Beth Kennedy, another fave, is Caesar's premonition-haunted drama queen of a wife. Given a Cher-like pile of curly black hair and a dramatic gown, she, naturally, slips into a riff on "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves." Matt Merchant's Mark Antony is a strapping, strutting BMOOC who, in a wry bit of interpolation, is already shackled up with Cleopatra.



Andy Robinson's Caesar tries to calm Beth Kennedy's Cher-like drama queen of a wife. (Ed Krieger)

Also on hand are such regulars as Rob Nagle, Joseph Leo Bwarie and Morgan Rusler, as well as newcomers Andy Robinson and Victoria Hoffman.

Tragedy and comedy zanily commingle when Robinson's Caesar heads to a Senate session dressed in a wrap-around cloak-sweater-chenille bedspread. He soon finds himself encircled by dagger-armed conspirators, who pull red bungee cords from the cape — his spouting wounds — while everyone sings Weezer's "Undone — The Sweater Song." That, in a nutshell, is the Troubies.

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Daryl H. Miller has been besotted with the arts since age 5, once he was old enough to sing with the church youth choir, and has yet to top the thrill of portraying Billy Bigelow in his rural high school's production of "Carousel." He has been covering the arts in Southern California for three decades for the Los Angeles Times, Daily News, LA Weekly, Orange County Register and other publications. He is also a copy editor.