

May 11, 2019

“Julius Weezer” at Troubadour Theater Company



The company of the Troubadour Theater Company's world premiere production of "JULIUS WEEZER" – now playing at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood. Photo by Ed Krieger.

Judging from the way that audience members of all ages flowed into El Portal Theatre from all directions on opening night, causing a serious unavailability of street parking spots, **Troubadour Theater Company's** new show, *Julius Weezer*, with its signature mash-up of a classical text and commedia dell'arte style of performance, is destined to be a well-deserved hit. Borrowing tunes from Weezer's playlist coupled with hilarious lyrics parodying Shakespeare's tragedy, *Julius Caesar*, and backed by a vigorous five-piece band, *Julius Weezer* is a giddy romp.



Andy Robinson and Beth Kennedy star in the Troubadour Theater Company's world premiere production of "JULIUS WEEZER" – now playing at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood. Photo— Ed Krieger.

Directed, choreographed, and adapted by **Matt Walker**, who seems villainous in the lead role of Cassius, there is enough of Shakespeare's text to satisfy Bard lovers while keeping the story on a more or less even keel and turning tragedy into broad comedy with rude jokes, sexual innuendos, free-wheeling improvisation, and audience participation. The Weezer tunes give principal males the opportunity to display their rock credentials with soaring falsettos. The well-known and lamented dearth of female roles in Shakespeare is ameliorated to an extent by having one female actor, **Beth Kennedy**, double in a pants part as the conspirator Metellus, while also playing Caesar's wife, Calpurnia. A bit of text mashing is achieved by having **Cloie Wyatt Taylor** appear as Cleopatra in scenes with Marcus Antonius (**Matt Merchant**), he of "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears" fame. **Suzanne Jolie Narbonne** plays as 'Servant to Cleopatra (identified as Charmian *Antony and Cleopatra*) and Cup Bearer. And **Victoria Hoffman** rounds out the female cast as Brutus's wife Portia.



Andy Robinson (center) and the company star in the Troubadour Theater Company's world premiere production of "JULIUS WEEZER" – now playing at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood. Photo— Ed Krieger.

Leading off as the vigorous, doomed Caesar, excellent **Andy Robinson** dominates the stage as his character lurches inevitably toward his rendezvous with twenty-three knife wounds, and later returns in the second act as Caesar's Ghost. But the play, as written, belongs to Brutus (splendid **Rob Nagle**), the noblest Roman of them all. **Rick Batalla** as Brutus' servant Lucius, is a non-stop ball of energy and invention, and doubles as conspirator Decius. **Joseph Leo Bwarie** comes on like gang-busters in the second act as a vigorous, fey, diminutive Octavius, destined to be Emperor Augustus. In the chorus of lesser-known conspirators are **Mike Sulprizio** as Casca, **Dave C. Wright** as Trebonius, and **Morgan Rusler** as Cinna, Cinna the Poet, and the Soothsayer who warns Caesar "to beware the ides of March."



Rob Nagle, Victoria Hoffman and Rick Batalla star in the Troubadour Theater Company's world premiere production of "JULIUS WEEZER" – now playing at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood. Photo— Ed Krieger.

With astounding energy, the company rocks out singing and dancing to the music of Weezer, improvising on the fly in the best commedia tradition. They bond with the audience at the get-go, talking to them, bringing some on stage, cruising in the aisles, inviting them to participate vocally from their seats in chants and more. As a relative newcomer to LA, this show is my first contact with Troubadour Theater Company. I assure you it will not be my last. My best girl and I had a ball!

The show's creative staff serves the company's style to a T with a fluid set design by **Christopher Murillo** (lighting design by **Bo Tindell**) that features a high platform and curtains that can be opened and closed with speed. Sound is critical for this show, and **Daniel S. Tator's** sound design is superb. Costumes by **Halei Parker** are perfect for characters and action. Additional Choreography is by **Nadine Ellis** and Suzanne Jolie Narbonne. The technical director is **Stacy Hennon Stone**. **Corey Womack** manages the stage with cool efficiency.



Matt Merchant, Joseph Leo Bwarie and Cloie Wyatt Taylor star in the Troubadour Theater Company's world premiere production of "JULIUS WEEZER" – now playing at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood. Photo— Ed Krieger.

And kudos to the band, visible upstage throughout, whose playing is the engine that supports it all. They are **Ryan Whyman**, keyboards; **Derick Finely**, drums; **Mikala Schmitz**, cello; **Mike Abraham**, guitar; and **Blake Estrada** bass.

Julius Weezer, produced by Beth Kennedy and Mike Sulprizo for Troubadour Theater Company, runs through Sunday, May 19 at El Portal Theatre, 11206 Weddington Street in North Hollywood.