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REVIEWS



Andy Robinson and Beth Kennedy in the Troubadour Theater Company's production of *Julius Weezer* at The El Portal Theatre. (Photo by Ed Krieger)

Julius Weezer

Reviewed by Terry Morgan
Troubadour Theater Company
Through May 19

RECOMMENDED

To quote an obscure Elizabethan playwright, “we lucky few” have been privileged to enjoy the work of the Troubadour Theater Company for 25 years now. Its trademark — combining a play (often Shakespeare) with the music of a famous artist, then adding its own blend of anarchy and witty topical references (Hello, *Game of Thrones* Starbucks cup!) — remains a reliable delight. Featuring a terrific cast, the Troubies’ latest show, a meld of *Julius Caesar* and the music of Weezer, is — beneath all the jokes — a surprisingly faithful version of the classic drama.

In ancient Rome, a triumphant Julius Caesar (Andy Robinson) is looking to be elected ruler for life, a model for tyranny that the republic was supposed to have abolished. Cassius (Matt Walker) allies with Brutus (Rob Nagle) to plot Caesar’s assassination. Elsewhere, Marcus Antonius (Matt Merchant) cozies up with Cleopatra (Cloie Wyatt Taylor), setting the stage for their own play. Caesar’s wife, Calpurnia (Beth Kennedy), begs Caesar not to meet with Brutus and his group, citing a dread dream, but the man’s desire for more power overshadows his caution.

Veteran actor/director Robinson cuts loose impressively as Caesar, delivering the rich dialogue with verve and skill. He also performs two of Weezer’s biggest hits: “Hash Pipe” and “Undone” (“If you want to destroy my toga...”), which are simply fun to watch. Walker, memorably sharp as chief plotter Cassius, displays both dramatic and comedic talent, and is particularly good in “Cold Dark World,” in which he finds every bad rhyme for “world.” Nagle is great as the dignified Brutus, in a balanced performance that juxtaposes deep dramatic acting with the abrupt humping of a fellow actor’s head (which seems like a consummate Troubie combo).

Merchant, excelling as Antonius, whips up the crowd with a strong performance of the “I came here to bury Caesar” speech, and his rendition of “Eulogy for a Rock Band” showcases a fine singing voice. Kennedy is funny in a couple of roles, from the fright-wigged Calpurnia who does quick Cher bits to conspirator Metellus, whose oft-ignored clever plan turns out to be rather appropriate. Taylor gives the alluring Cleopatra an archly comic twist, but Rick Batalla steals the show as cheerful servant Lucius (pronounced “luscious”), bringing a contagious sense of glee to every scene he’s in.

Matt Walker’s direction is tighter and more focused on the story than it usually is, which is appropriate for this darker-than-usual play. While his adaptation honors the material, it also finds room for an (apparently) extremely delicious cupcake, Nerf crossbow bolts, a usage of “Great Caesar’s Ghost!” that would make Perry White proud, and a guy spending a good chunk of the show impaled with a spear yet seemingly unimpaired. Also, the show features the line, “Mischief, thou art afoot,” which prompts the tossing of a rubber foot onstage, so fans of puns and prop comedy may equally rejoice.

Note: This is a limited run and closes on May 19.

The El Portal Theatre, 5269 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood; Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 4 p.m. & 8 p.m.; Sun., 4 p.m.; through May 19. www.elportalthatetre.com. Running time: approximately two hours and 15 minutes, with one intermission.