

JULIUS WEEZER ROCKS THE ROMAN EMPIRE RAMBUNCTIOUSLY!

Slapstick, vaudeville, burlesque, crazy Roman attire, out-of-the-box outlandish premises, impersonations, general tomfoolery, yes, there's Comedy Tonight!!

The Troubadour Theatre Company, or The Troubies present a Roman escapade, Directed, Choreographed and Adapted by Matt Walker, who is also the Artistic Director of the Company, that occurs both in Ancient Rome and Current No Ho (North Hollywood, to all you foreigners...)

It's everything in one: part three-ring circus, part rock concert, part Shakespeare and part hilarious improvisation.

A terrific ensemble of actors pull this off without a hitch, which, given the absurdness of the plot and the continual ad libs and asides, is darn-right applaudable! Standing out, as Cassius, Matt Walker is most flamboyant and dastardly, Victoria Hoffman as Portia has duality of emotions going for her, Matt Merchant, as Marcus Antonius has a powerful, booming voice and embodies the image of the character, Joseph Leo Bwarie as Octavius Caesar/Augustus who blasts through the walls with his energy, haughtiness and savviness, and my favorite character(s) Lucius/Decius, both hysterically played to perfection by Rick Batalla.

Each character has their own unique style of presentation and lots of nuances within their portrayals to make them memorable, and they all work so well together in this romp of a tale. Everyone spouts Shakespeare with ease, takes their cues to improv whenever it happens, sings up a storm and dances, well, some better than others, but it's all part of the merriment, anyway...

The energy is high and frivolous and they put their all into this show. Other actors in the solid, flexible cast: Rob Nagle as Brutus, Andy Robinson as Julius Caesar, Mike Sulprizo as Casca, Cloie Wyatt Taylor as Cleopatra, Trebonius/Ceasars's Servant, both played by David C. Wright, Morgan Rusler as Cinna the Soothsayer/Poet, Suzanne Jolie Narbonne as Cleo's Servant and Cup Bearer, and Metellus/Calpurnia played by Beth Kennedy.

Behind them on stage is the "rock band"/orchestra comprised of Ryan Whyman, Keyboards, Derick Finely, Drums, Mikala Schmitz, Cello, Mike Abraham, Guitar, and Blake Esrada, Bass. They really get the show off to a roaring start, cranking out some hard rock and setting the tone for this crazy adventure, playing throughout, intensifying the well-known winding and turning plot.

A recurring bit never gets old; the secret handshakes these Roman No-Hoians engage in, each time they depart from each other ~ they are never the same, and are quite imaginative and appropriately silly. The scenes are interspersed with music, dancing from eras gone by (i.e. the Monkey, the Hustle) and just plain frivolity! The whole cast, at different points in the show interacts with the audience, throwing out ad-libs to people not seated until after they started the show, "rebuking" them, and bringing up audience members on stage to take part in the festivities, really putting them "in the scene."

The staging throughout is inventive and effective. Much of the choreography is intentionally done badly, and purposely goofy, which with all the other elements combined, the Scenic Design by Christopher Scott Murillo, Lighting by Bo Tindell, Costumes by Haley Parker, and Co-Choreographers Nadine Ellis and Suzanne Jolie Narbonne (a beautiful dancer who gets to briefly shine during one scene) is so much fun to watch!

There are countless bits and shenanigans, from a Cher imitation and strains of "Gypsies, Tramps & Thieves," and "If I could turn back Time;" woven into the scheme of things, to Keystone Cops-type of staging where everything goes berserk at once, to "Luscious's" flippant one-liners, in the style of Redd Foxx, Tommy Smothers or Lou Costello. Impeccable comedic timing!

After Caesar comes back as an apparition (Great Caesar's Ghost, of course!) he gets his revenge, working his way through the cast of characters, killing them one by one. Rap songs, a Do-si-do with spears, except for Augustus, who uses a fan to battle, until it's over, then uses his fan like a mic-drop, just leaving it behind as he exits... Lots of L. A. references, like them meeting at Echo Park for the showdown, Cinna splitting the scene to go find the sanctuary city of Pacoima, Kaiser "Temporary" hospitalization needed, and ending this insanity with multiply-stabbed but still singing members of this merry band of misfits.

For a night of pure gaiety, get yourself over to the historic El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood to see this before it closes on the 19th of May!

PHOTO CREDIT: Ed Krieger

