

Review 'ABBAMEMNON' a fun, jam-packed hybrid



By **DAVID C. NICHOLS**

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Darrin Revitz and Matt Walker in "ABBAMEMNON" at the Falcon Theatre. (Chelsea Sutton)

Aeschylus meets Agnetha, Björn, Benny and Anni-Frid in “ABBAMEMNON,” the latest deconstruction from Troubadour Theater Company. The classic Greek playwright, Swedish pop group and incomparable troupe may never be quite the same again, and neither will audiences.

We sense something afoot upon entering the Falcon Theatre to see helmeted soldiers posing with attendees for photo ops onstage. Once the choir-robed company arrives, selling “Take a Chance on Me” as retooled preshow instructional hymn, cracked mirth is already bubbling.

And with the ever-invaluable Beth Kennedy’s advent as a Watchman seemingly born out of Monty Python’s hip flask, followed by a title opening number reworded to the title tune of another ABBA-centric musical, all bets are off, and remain so for the entire iconoclastic proceedings.

Maintaining a tightrope balance between grand neoclassicism, sunny '70s kitsch and the company’s inbred topical spontaneity, chief lunatic Matt Walker and his demented triple-threat forces yank the House of Atreus and ABBA into taut, tickling symbiosis.

Thus we get Walker’s titular King of Malibu, storming to the edge of the top without tipping over,

perfectly matched by Monica Schneider's marvelously arch Clytemnestra, her vengeful "Dancing Queen" composed of equal parts Laura Benanti, Pat Benatar and Elvira, Mistress of the Dark.

Both of them, like Katherine Donahoe's resonant Cassandra and Rob Nagle's wry Chorus Leader, merge straight-faced declamation to the company's trademark satirical mayhem. Then again, everyone does: Jason Turner's airborne Menelaus, Darrin Revitz's underused but incisive Iphigenia, Rick Batalla's beyond-gonzo Aegisthus and the uproarious Joseph Keane's impaled Herald are but signpost turns amid a seamless group barrage.

The designs are austere apt, particularly Jeremy Pivnick's mordant-to-loopy lighting and Sharon McGunagle's costume parade, all spangled Quiana and ever-bloodier tunics. Molly Alvarez's choreography is old-school effective, and musical director Eric Heinly, as ever, brings out the utmost in band and performers.

Longtime buffs may bemoan "ABBAMEMNON'S" comparative restraint and brevity, but there's stark hilarity in seeing how far these irreplaceable wackos take the property's gore and gravitas and bend it into ABBAland, with the final "Wizard of Oz"-flavored twist quietly inspired.

Indeed, this compact, jam-packed hybrid -- which travels to La Mirada after its Burbank run -- may be the Troubies' most refined synthesis of artistic mission and subversive attack yet.

It honors its source more potently than many traditional takes, and -- no offense to countless fans and worldwide grosses -- uses ABBA's songs with more narrative wit and integrity in 80 minutes than "Mamma Mia!" did in 2 1/2 hours.

"ABBAMEMNON," Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Dr., Burbank. 8 p.m. Fridays, 4 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 4 and 7 p.m. Sundays, Ends July 13. \$27-\$57. (818) 955-8101 or www.FalconTheatre.com. Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes.