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Matt Walker, top rear, and his multitalented ensemble in its commedia dell'arte-infused mash-up of Shakespeare and 1970s disco, "A Midsummer Saturday Night's Fever Dream." (Chelsea Sutton)

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Photos: Arts and culture in pictures by The Times

By Philip Brandes
June 12, 2013 | 11:28 a.m.

Though Shakespeare's Bottom claimed his dream was "past the wit of man" to describe, it's well within the wit of the Troubadour Theater Company to revive in spectacular sequin-studded style with the return of "A Midsummer Saturday Night's Fever Dream" to Burbank's Falcon Theatre.

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Even by the Troubies' typically reliable comic standards, this commedia dell'arte-infused mash-up of classical lit and pop culture is an exceptionally hilarious and energetic romp.

Arguably the zaniest of Shakespeare's comedies, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" — with its interwoven narrative triad of frantic, mismatched lovers, mischievous prankster fairies and oafish would-be thespians — lends itself particularly well to the slapstick clowning and improvised fourth wall demolition that are the Troubie's forte.

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Setting Shakespeare's self-absorbed characters to the narcissistic excesses of the 1970s disco scene provides an irreverently inspired visual, thematic and musical foundation, as director Matt Walker and his cohorts gleefully cavort to iconic "Saturday Night Fever" soundtrack hits by the Bee Gees, KC and the Sunshine Band, the Trammps and Yvonne Elliman. Eric Heinly's red-hot four-piece band features period-perfect wah-wah guitar flourishes by Linda Taylor, reinforcing the romantic high jinks with theme song snippets as wide-ranging as "Love Boat" funk and "Love Story" schmaltz.

Walker applies his professional clowning and acrobatic skills to excellent effect as the show's twin instigators of comic mayhem. As fairy Puck, he casts misfiring love spells over the quartet of naive young aristocrats (Beth Kennedy, Joseph Leo Bwarie, Katherine Malak, Tyler King) and causes fairy queen Titania (Monica Schneider) to become enamored of Rick Batalla's (temporarily literal) jackass Bottom.

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As the inept director-playwright Peter Quince, Walker steers Bottom and his band of crude laborers (Rob Nagle, Lisa Valenzuela, Mike Sulprizio) through the lamentable play performed to celebrate the wedding of Toluca Lake's Duke and Duchess (Morgan Rusler, Suzanne Jolie Narbonne).

This multitalented ensemble balances comic precision with enough textual integrity to prove its classical bona fides and capture the core of Shakespeare's take on the fickleness of human affection. But along the way no brow is too low to indulge, and if these players have offended it's only because they've done their job so well.

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"A Midsummer Saturday Night's Fever Dream," Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank. 8 p.m. Fridays, 4 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 4 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends July 7. \$39.50-\$42. (818) 955-8101 or www.falcontheatre.com. Running time: 2 hours.

Also July 12-14 at La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts, 14900 La Mirada Blvd., La Mirada, \$35-\$50. (562) 944-9801 or www.lamiradatheatre.com

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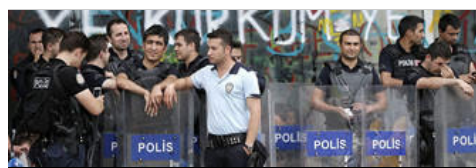
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