



Fleetwood Macbeth
Troubadour Theatre Company
Falcon Theatre
Reviewed by Lynne Bronstein

It's summer and that means that the Troubadour Theatre Company ("The Troubies" to their fans and groupies) are hacking up Shakespeare again. But the old boy doesn't mind because the hacking is so funny it doesn't hurt. For possible reasons of economy, the Troubies' offering this time around is "Fleetwood Macbeth," a revival of a former spoof. Retooled with some very topical references (Sarah Palin, the 405 freeway closure, Congressman Wiener's Tweets), this rendition of "the Scottish Play" contains about one third actual Shakespeare and two thirds slapstick, burlesque, and the music of a major album rock band.



Banquo - Macbeth & the Witches

As usual, the whole shebang has been conceived and largely improvised under the direction of Matt Walker, who sings, dances, acts, does acrobatics (he went to Clown College!), and is so charismatic that he inevitably steals the show even when he takes a supporting role. Here, Walker essays the role of Banquo, Macbeth's friend who is killed by Macbeth due to the latter's paranoia. Sure,

he could have played the ambitious weasel Macbeth but has courteously allowed Morgan Rusler to play him instead. Rusler is certainly funny enough (and is able to show off his serious acting skills during the "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" speech) but somehow, Walker is hard to ignore, to the point that even after Banquo kicks the bucket, Walker continues to make appearances (oh well, the character is supposed to appear as a ghost) and the audience is glad for it.

"Macbeth" is known as "The Scottish Play" because there is a superstition that saying the name of the show is bad luck. This is explained in a prologue during which the characters are introduced (the Scots sport fake big feet, kilts, and atrocious Scottish accents) and audience members are recruited to serve as foot soldiers who get killed in a battle with the Scots. Then the action of the play begins, sort of. Act One features a lot of nonsense, a few Fleetwood Mac songs, and tidbits of Shakespeare dialogue.



Lisa Valenzuela - Morgan Rusler

Like Monty Python, the Troubies enjoy pulling a joke out like taffy, prolonging its silliness. Not everyone believes in this humor technique but somehow even when we know it is ridiculous, it causes giggles. King Duncan of Scotland (Rob Nagle in white beard and false beer belly) speaks about how old he is which leads to a series of "You are so old that..." jokes. They are old jokes but you can't help laughing at them. Likewise, when Macbeth begins to fear the task of killing the king and says his famous line "Is that a dagger that I see before me?" he actually says every word that rhymes with dagger, while various Troubies prance across the stage impersonating Mick Jagger, a lagger, someone with a swagger; you get the idea (this might be all about cueing actors who can't remember their lines, LOL).

improved tremendously on Shakespeare's Three Witches. "Fleetwood Macbeth" has a chorus line of nine witches! And eight of the nine are sexy foxy ladies in fishnets and flimsy outfits. The ninth, Hecate (Beth Kennedy) looks like your typical Halloween witch but she's sexy too. The Witches sing, dance and conjure, opening the show with a defiant rendition of "Tusk" and providing nice background vocals on Lady Macbeth's (Lisa Valenzuela) medley of "Dreams" and "Rhiannon."



Matt Walker & Witches

Valenzuela, a Troubie regular, sings up a storm as Lady Macbeth although her insidious prodding of her spouse is rather subtle here and she seems just too cute to be a nasty nagging wife. Other cast members who stand out include Evan Arnold as a warrior whose stupidity recalls Mortimer Snerd from the old radio days, and Jason Turner who not only plays Macduff but also Macduff Junior (you have to see this scene to believe it).

It seemed like there were too few musical numbers in the first act but then again there is a lot of exposition to take care of in the first act. Act Two is where you will hear familiar Fleetwood Mac songs like "Dreams," "Gold Dust Woman," and "Landslide."

Kudos to choreographers Nadine Ellis, Christine Lakin, and Monica Schneider for their extraordinary work (Ken Merckx is listed as Fight Choreographer) and to musical director Eric Heinly and his band for the excellent musicianship.

"Fleetwood Macbeth" plays at the Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank, 818.955.8181, through August 14, 2011 Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays at 4 p.m. *But on July 15 through 17, when the 405 be closed, "Fleetwood Macbeth" doth come to La Mirada instead* (see www.troubie.com).