



ET TU, WEEZER...THEN FALL CAESAR

Fortunately, Shakespeare's *JULIUS CAESAR* survives deconstruction at the hands of the **Troubadour Theater Company** (otherwise known as the "Troubies") as they skewer their way through the revered text of the Roman tragedy set in 44B.C.. How does one intersperse the rock idiom using the music of the band **WEEZER** into an unrelated story, twisting the tale in ways pleasing to the gods of comedy? After years of engagement with similar pursuits, the Troubies have conquered the right formula. The raucous laughter filling the **El Portal Theatre** in **North Hollywood (NOHO)** means that *JULIUS WEEZER* will enhance their inglorious, side-splitting reputation.



This critic salivates over the prospect of enjoying an LA theatre weekend which boasts both a critically-acclaimed performance of **Independent Shakespeare Company**'s *JULIUS CAESAR* followed by a twisted version of the same play by the LA famous Troubies, affectionately ripping it to shreds. Hail, Caesar! Having taught this play to high schoolers for over 20 years, the educator in me savors the prospect of dipping his sword into this bloody enterprise on two successive days.

No “troubielations” here, but a few surprises on the way to Philippi. Supremely impressed with the Shakespearean language as interpreted by these descendants of **Thespis**. In other words, they rocked the lingo. The text of the play largely survives in this interpretation, save the expected musical interpolations of the alternative/pop rock band **WEEZER**. Also, the play *ANTONY and CLEOPATRA* curiously sidles into the action, too.

Loved the decision to expand the contributions of rock star “Octavius Caesar” (**Joseph Leo Bwarie**) and luscious “Lucius” (**Rick Batalla**), offering ripe opportunities to inject riotous humor into the goings-on. Count me a fan of these two laugh merchants (from LA, rather than Venice). *Insert groan here*. Can't bring myself to bestow my blessing on all of the mangled residue of the revised script; however, parody and improvisation can't be contained in a flask. The wine needs to breathe and it does so inevitably, sometimes to exhaustion.

The core performances of “Brutus” (**Rob Nagle**), “Cassius” (**Matt Walker**) and “Marcus Antonius” (**Matt Merchant**) all are worthy of their togas. The title character “Julius Caesar” (**Andy Robinson**) likewise earns his purple, bedazzled toga, even though he takes on an expanded role in this version, not all of it particularly stageworthy. He fancies himself “constant as the Northern Star, with no fellow in the firmament”. Heaven knows, though, that both of these fellows, Brutus and Antony, deliver their competing funeral orations



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effectively and with a seriousness that is noteworthy. The crux of Shakespeare's tragedy survives the attack of lunacy, yet that approach actually nourishes the comedy.

Admiration goes to **Michael Sulprizio** for his conniving "Casca", **Victoria Hoffman** for her distraught "Portia" and **Dave C. Wright** for his ever persistent "Trebonius". And how exhilarating that **Morgan Rusler** has duties on three fronts: the creepy "Soothsayer", the conspirator "Cinna" as well as "Cinna the Poet" who gets to bite the dust at the hands of the frenzied mob as they "tear him for his bad verses".

None of the other players in this highly accomplished troupe of actors (or are they a "troube") need "hide their faces even from darkness". In fact, the light shines brightly on these players as well including **Beth Kennedy** as both the conspirator "Metellus Cimber" and "Calpurnia", the devoted, yet frightful (a la Bride of Frankenstein) wife of Caesar, **Suzanne Jolie Narbonne** as "Servant to Cleopatra / Cupbearer" and **Cloie Wyatt Taylor** as "Cleopatra" herself.

Director **Matt Walker** unleashes the gods of merriment to clown away in pursuit of silliness. There are the usual ridiculous wigs and overbaked pancake make-up plus errant limbs, nerf arrows, bungee wounds for Caesar and other hilarious costumes, too (compliments of **Halei Parker**).



All the while a band of savvy musicians accompany the top drawer singing of this cast. They emote – passionately – the fractured and zany lyrics of the piggybacked tunes of **Weezer** as their "ghosts" vibrantly rock in the background. It may not be the feast of Lupercal, but all joyously celebrate *LIVE* music in a theatre setting anyway!

Obviously, the current times in our country vividly demonstrate how uncomfortably **JULIUS CAESAR** looms in our politics. “He would be king, and I do fear it”, as Casca explains. Trumpism does figure in this humorous concoction, yet not to the extent one



would expect. My guess is that audience members often engage the actors with their own contributions here and there, allowing for some relevant improvisations on this account.

The **Ides of March** in **May**? Not such a bad idea, it turns out! Now, what are the demented minds in “*Troubieland*” planning to unwrap for their upcoming,

popular Christmas show?

PC: **Ed Krieger**



Bill Reese