

# musicals IN LA

Celebrating Theatre in Southern California

Tuesday, March 27, 2012

## Who Stole the Show in the Troubies' *Two Gentlemen of Chicago*?



Matt Walker, Christine Lakin, Monica Schneider and Rob Nagle.

Photos by Chelsea Sutton

The inspired mockery of the Troubadour Theatre Company's latest production *Two Gentlemen of Chicago* proves that a great idea never gets old. Following their highly successful formula of combining Shakespeare's text with iconic music and mining it for laughs, they have once again concocted a show that hits its target from every angle. With an abundance of pop culture references, topical humor, and plenty of in-the-moment improv, it's got classic Troubie written all over it. Oh, and did I mention there's a dog?

That can only mean that this time they've taken Shakespeare's earliest comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a play that already contains an abundance of the absurd, and thrown it in the pot with Chicago's classic hits of the '70s and '80s, complete with wah wah pedal and brass section. And what a mix it makes. In balancing its many parts, it's hard to say who or what steals the show more often.

Is it the befuddling grandiosity of one gent, or the true caddish behavior of the other? Valentine (**Rob Nagle**) makes the case for the former in his candy pink finery, red sweetheart lips, and white powdered wig. (My god, he's almost one-third head in **Sharon McGunigle's** fantastic costume!) It's worth the price of admission just to see him in his Act II cupid outfit with wings and Roman sandals...and playing the pan pipes. Or is it **Matt Walker** as Proteus, the scheming good guy/bad friend who sings, dances, plays the puns and the women, and gets the best ominous villain underscoring possible?

Maybe it's **Beth Kennedy**, who in my book tops all of her previous roles with her portrayal of Launce. Commanding the stage, alone with a dog, she throws herself completely into her utterly endearing character and is funnier than I've ever seen her. Her run-on jokes and top-of-Act II recap with Speed (**Matthew Morgan**) are highlights, as well as a gleefully called foul on Walker opening night that occurred when he was late on an entrance (though I think he's still debating that).



**Morgan Rusler, Rob Nagle and Rick Batalla**

The honor of scene-stealer of the night could go to **Rick Batalla**'s double turn as Silvia's (**Monica Schneider**) prancing suitor Thurio in his "sha-bam sha-bam blue boots," and Proteus' father Antonio, so old you better watch out or he'll fall down and not be able to get up. **Morgan Rusler** makes a play for it as the Duke who is always ready with a trombone lick when his name is mentioned and has a rather odd relationship with Thurio.

Then again it might go to **Christine Lakin** (Julia), and maids Lucetta (Katie Nunez) and Brushetta (**Lisa Valenzuela**) and their gorgeous 3-part harmonies on "Call on Me" or their scene remaking Lakin into a boy à la Bagger Vance. Lakin is also responsible for the terrific choreography in the dance numbers.

**Joseph Keane** is making a regular habit of stealing the end of Act I, last time by getting his tongue stuck to a pole in *A Christmas Westside Story*; this time with an absolutely beautiful end of Act I classic ballet pas de deux with Suzanne Jolie Narbonne en pointe. Even the Winter Warlock, fresh from his study in 'biamic ontameter' at the RSC (Real Shakespeare Company), makes his attempt at stealing a scene or two with a few disco moves.

The band often steals the show under **Eric Heinly**'s musical direction, and it should, on Chicago tunes where the horns are featured in bold arrangements. Positioned up center and always on display, they sound terrific on classics like "25 or 6 to 4," "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is," "Wishing You Were Here," and "Make Me Smile."



Beth Kennedy, Roo the Pug, and Matthew Morgan

**Cesar the dog whisperer, the Chippendale boys, Walker's wig, all of them do their level best to take the honor but in the end it is Roo the Pug, playing Crab the Dog, who succeeds in stealing the hearts of an entire audience, and every scene he enters. And he does it without saying a word. Mr. DeMille...I think he's ready for his close-up.**

**Rest assured this latest Troubie confection will leave you breathless with laughter and begging for more, for once they catch a joke by the tail, you can bet money they'll chase it till the cows come home - all the while wooing you with their own special charm. They're an irresistible bunch.**

***Two Gentlemen of Chicago* runs through April 22 at the Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank, CA 91505 . For tickets go to [www.falcontheatre.com](http://www.falcontheatre.com).**