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## TWO GENTLEMEN OF CHICAGO

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WOW!

The Troubadour Theater Company is back for more inspired silliness as they take on William Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen Of Verona*, retitled here *Two Gentlemen Of Chicago*, the better to feature a dozen or so Greatest Hits by the leading U.S. singles-charting group of the 1970s.



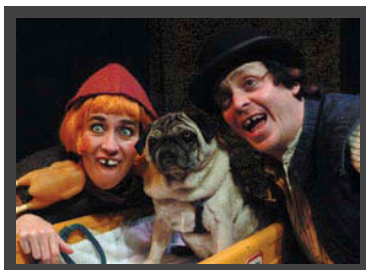
The plot is more or less the same as Shakespeare concocted it. Proteus (Matt Walker) loves Julia (Christine Lakin). Valentine (Rob Nagle) loves Silvia (Monica Schneider). At the court of the Duke Of Milan (Morgan Rusler), Proteus falls in love at first sight with Silvia, who's engaged to Thurio (Rick Batalla). Launce (Beth Kennedy) and Speed (Matthew Morgan) play the fools. Julia disguises herself as a pageboy and no one realizes she's really a girl. Valentine gets abducted by a trio of outlaws. All's well that ends well. Two couples make plans for a double wedding.

Yes, indeed, the storyline is mostly Shakespeare, but (to paraphrase Hamlet), The Rest Is Troubles, which if you haven't seen one of their shows before means the following:

Expect lots of audience interaction, especially if you're sitting in the front row. Expect plenty of references to current pop culture, including bits about Sponge Bob, Angelina Jolie and her leggy Oscar pose, the movie *The Help* ("You is kind. You is smart. You is ..."), Enya, Twitter, The Dog Whisperer, and Milt Romney, to name just a few. Expect sight and sound gags galore—hoots and whistles, a character who plays a trombone lick whenever his name is mentioned, a costume adorned with plastic sausages and Cornish game hen epaulettes, etc. Expect puns aplenty, including a long riff on those "Make like a ... and ..." jokes. ("Make like Santa Claus and leave my presents/presence.") Expect adlib after adlib ("You look like the love child of Wayne Newton and Marlo Thomas"), lines which may in fact be scripted simply to *sound* like they're off the cuff. Expect lines most definitely not penned by William S. ("Dearest Sylvia, I will be in your chamber tonight for shizzle.")

Perhaps most importantly, expect to hear hit song after hit song, with some tweaking of lyrics to fit the plot. You'll hear "25 Or 6 To 4" as exposition ("Soon their love will turn to woe. *Two Gentlemen Of Chicago*.") "If You Leave Me Now" becomes "If You Leave Her Now"—sung by Proteus' maids, then by the entire cast and even the band as advice to Proteus. "You're The Inspiration" features a portable mirror ball held aloft to set a romantic mood. Brandon Brealut, Joseph Keane, and Morgan bump and grind as shirtless, bowtied Chippendale-style dancers to "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?". (Then again it might have been another early Chicago tune, since so many of their '70s hits sound alike) The three outlaws sing "Saturday In The Park" as "Saturday In The Woods." Dance captains Keane and Suzanne Jolie Narbonne execute a exquisite pas de deux to

"Colour My World," choreographed by Lakin. "Hard Habit To Break" serves as a vocal showcase for Schneider's gorgeous pipes.



In addition to the characters mentioned in the earlier brief synopsis, *Two Gentlemen Of Chicago* also features Julia's servant Lucetta (Katie Nunez), joined here by fellow Latina Bruschetta (Lisa Valenzuela), a role not found in the Shakespeare original. In addition to playing "The Good Sir Thurio, of the One Percent," Batalla also appears, dressed in fright wig, as Proteus' father Antonio, so decrepit he can hardly stand up (so don't take away his cane, even if he asks you to). Narbonne is Ursula, a character you might not recall from *Two Gentlemen Of Verona*, but who is "clearly referred to in line 105 of Scene 4 in Act 4." (Thanks to Narbonne for this tidbit in her bio.) A recurring character in the *Troubies'* holiday shows makes his or her first Shakespeare appearance. And then there's Crab The Dog, brought brilliantly to life by Nagle's very own Roosevelt The Pug, who with a little manipulation of ears or neck fur can be made to look like (among others) Yoda, Princess Leia, Queen Elizabeth I, Ernest Borgnine, or even Joan Rivers inside (or out of) a wind tunnel.

As in any *Troubies* show, performances are in a class by themselves, company members coming from backgrounds as diverse as musical comedy, ballet, TV and film, and the legitimate stage. (Midway through Act Two, Nagle gets to play Valentine's soliloquy "What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by" straight, and it's a humdinger of a performance.)

Batalla, Breault, Keane, Kennedy (who manages to hold her own opposite the scene-stealing Roosevelt), Lakin, Morgan, Nagle, Narbonne, Nunez, Rusler, Schneider, Valenzuela, and Walker are all consummate triple threats at the top of their game. (You *have* to be adept at playing it straight in order to play it as "bent" as the *Troubies* do.) Oh, and scene-stealing Roosevelt The Pug is a keeper, to be brought back again and again I hope I hope.

Musical director/drummer Eric Heinly conducts a sensational center-stage seven-piece band\*, heavy on the horns, the better to do Chicago musical justice.

Lakin choreographs with imagination and panache, and any *Troubie* who wasn't a dancer prior to joining the company certainly is one now, the show's full-cast production numbers being particular treats.



Jeffrey McLaughlin has designed a minimalist set which makes clever and frequent use of a

pair of curtains. Jeremy Pivnick's lighting design is as varied as it gets (with more precisely executed lighting cues than I could possibly have counted). Sharon McGunigle's costumes are once again amazingly imaginative creations. (One character remarks that Thurio's costume makes him look like "the love child of Wayne Newton and Marlo Thomas"—and it does!) Julie Ferrin's sound design is Chicago concert-ready. Kudos go also to prop designer/stage manager Corey Womack, vocal director Rachael Lawrence, and Keane for his choreography of "Saturday In The Park."

Last but far from least, there is the man behind all of the above madness and merriment, the one-of-a-kind genius that is Troubies' Artistic Director/Two Gentlemen Of Chicago director Walker.

Two Gentlemen Of Chicago looks a sure thing to sell out performance after performance, and rightly so. Troubies' fans are legion, and certain to be tickled pink by this latest inspired tribute to two of the world's greatest. Shakespeare plus Chicago equals Magic.

\*Serafin Aguilar (trumpet), Denis Jiron (trombone), Jack Majdecki (guitar), Kevin McCourt (keyboards), Ed Pepper (sax), and Kevin Stewart (bass).

Troubadour Theatre Company, Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank. Through September 26. Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 4:00. (No Sunday performance on April 8. Added 4:00 performance on Saturday April 7. Reservations: 818 955-8101

**[www.FalconTheatre.com](http://www.FalconTheatre.com)**

—Steven Stanley

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Photos: Chelsea Sutton