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Theater Review: Targets plentiful in holiday satire

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Matt Walker's Troubies have been mashing up pop culture with the back catalogs of music icons since 1995. The well is running dry on worthy source material, but "Frosty the Snow Manilow" at the Falcon Theatre in Burbank proves that barely matters anymore.

Walker and his impressive company take their game up a notch and reach a state of grace forever balanced between reverence and rudeness. His players take no prisoners in their pursuit of laughter, even if it's at the expense of audience members or fellow cast-mates.



Jack Frost (Rick Batalla), Cop (Mike Sulprizio) and Santa (Jack McGee) in the Troubadour Theater Company's Frosty The Snow Manilow at the Falcon Theatre. (Courtesy of Chelsea Sutton)

This year the Troubies take one of their flimsiest ideas and bring it home with high energy and precise timing. Even their improvised asides have reached a height where only the wittiest cast and crew survive. The night I saw the show they mercilessly picked on the sound guy for missing one cue. And some patrons in the front row became part of the show in ways they probably never expected.

"Frosty the Snow Manilow" is based on the 1969 version of "Frosty the Snowman."

The Troubies stretch the plot with songs from Barry Manilow. His material sounds kitschy, but Walker makes the tunes fit by making them unrecognizable. The tone is that of a boy who couldn't care less if coal was waiting for him, as long as his pranks cracked up his relatives.

Regulars like Christine Lakin (Karen) and Lorin Shapiro (Hocus) anchor the ensemble while allowing room for new additions to flourish. Rick Batalla is positively unhinged as a train station manager. Paul C. Vogt tackles the role of Frosty with relish and gusto, joining his identical twin, Peter, in some hilarious snowman love scenes.

"Rescue Me" favorite Jack McGee goes from longtime Troubie fan to participant. He gets to narrate, and later steals scenes as a pimped-out Santa Claus who saves the day.

Walker's targets are fresh, with jokes about Tiger Woods and characters based on the White House crashers.

Walker keeps his players in line by stopping the show in the middle of scenes. At one point he admonished his cast, "stop making us laugh; make them laugh," pointing to the audience. But those not in on the joke are missing the point.

The Troubies promise loose adaptations where anything goes, as long as the end result is laughter. And

there's plenty of that to last until whatever insane ideas Walker comes up with next are unleashed on an increasingly suspecting public.

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