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SERIOUS AND SOULFUL – A WITHER’S TALE FROM THE TROUBIES

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Serious and soulful – A Wither’s Tale from The Troubies

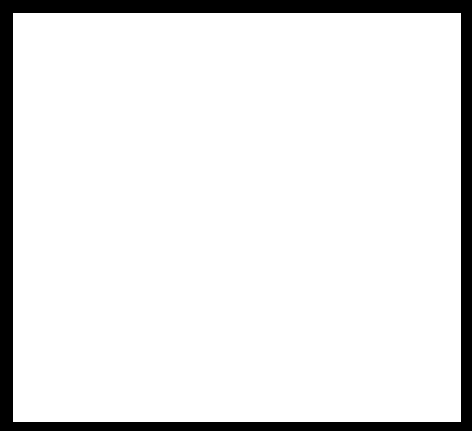
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Those madcap pranksters from **The Troubadour Theatre Company** are at it again, mixing a Shakespearean plot with some pop hits to create a new show. This time they’ve taken a lesser-known **Shakespearean** work, *A Winter’s Tale*, and sprinkled it with some soul from **Bill Withers** to create *A Wither’s Tale*.

Long-term **Troubie** fans, who usually arrive ready to laugh enthusiastically at the on-stage antics, will need to brace themselves for a more serious outing here.

The Bard’s intense psychological drama perfectly complements the haunting songs of seventies singer/songwriter **Bill Withers**, albeit with some switching of lyrics and a few throwaway pop-culture references for the occasional jokey bit.

With snippets of familiar themes from **Shakespeare’s** earlier tragedy *Othello*, and even a fragment of plot from the classic Greek myth of *Oedipus*, *A Winter’s Tale* unfolds in a curious fashion. The first three acts are serious, while the last two short acts strive for comedy and a happy ending. In the story, King Leontes (**Matt Walker**) becomes inflamed by jealousy. He sends his pregnant consort, Queen Hermione (**Monica Schneider**), to jail on suspicion of an affair with his oldest friend, King Polixenes (**Matt Merchant**), and even issues the death sentence of their baby girl Perdita (**Katherine Malak**), only to lament his subsequent solitude. Many years pass and the sorrowful King is miraculously offered a chance at happiness.

Writer/Director **Matt Walker** is not afraid to plumb the depths of this mostly dark story of jealousy, banishment and regret. Consequently, this poignant show seems a lot quieter than the **Troubie’s** usual fare, with far less of the wacky hilarity that generally ensues. The cast certainly proves they have the mettle to tackle **Shakespeare**.

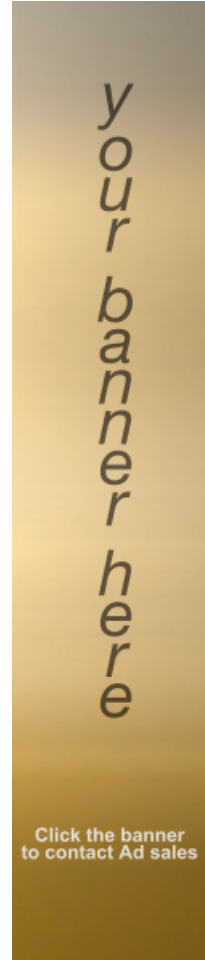
The five-piece backing band – clad in period costume, no less – is magnificent, led by Musical Director **Eric Heinly** on drums and features a memorable performance by **John Krovoza** on cello and violin. It’s obvious a great deal of care was taken in putting together a top-notch band that flawlessly duplicates all the quiet hit songs from the catalogue of **Bill Withers**.

Founding member **Lisa Valenzuela** has a couple of important roles, including a preliminary précis of the plot delivered at a breakneck (and slightly confusing) pace. Sadly, there were no opportunities for **Valenzuela** to belt out a tune with her legendary powerhouse voice. Nevertheless, she gets some comic mileage from her ‘Justin Beiber’ wig.



photos by Chelsea Sutton

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Walker’s impressive performance of **Wither’s** best-known hit *Ain’t No Sunshine* includes a fantastic solo on harmonica and all but brought the house down. **Monica Schneider** as Queen Hermione has a strong voice. **Katherine Malak** as Princess Perdita brings a great deal of grace and beauty to her performance.

Clearly working with a bigger budget this year, the show features atmospheric special effects (dry ice) as well as several stylish lighting effects, courtesy of designer Jeremy Pivnick. While the set design by **Mike Jespersen** of a substantial archway door flanked by curtains is simple and effective, the period costumes, designed by **Sharon McGunigle**, are especially gorgeous.

As always, **Matt Walker** had his bright yellow sequined cloth hanging from his belt, but it was hard to imagine him blowing the whistle and calling a foul and bringing the show to a halt to ridicule a cast member for fluffing a line. Generally in those instances, accusations get tossed about, such as “Unauthorized butchering of the text without a meat license!”

Not so on opening night.

Also absent from the performance was the extended improvisation and indulgent ad-libbing that – while hilarious – rendered the previous show, [CHiPs. The Musical.](#) so sluggish.

A *Wither’s Tale* is a beautifully presented show that scoots along for an hour and a half, with no intermission, and showcases this gifted gang of clowns at their serious and soulful best.

If you have any trouble obtaining tickets to this hot show, then do consider becoming a Troubadour or Falcon Theatre subscriber.

You’ll find it’s definitely worth your while.

A *Wither’s Tale*

[The Falcon Theatre](#)

4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank CA

Performances:

Runs until – Sunday, Sept 26, 2010

Thursdays through Saturdays at 8pm, and Sundays at 4pm.

Tickets: \$34.50—\$42.00

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Review by Pauline Adamek

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