

It's a Stevie Wonderful Life

By **Bill Raden**

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Ahh, remember the 1970s? When Stevie Wonder was undisputed champ of the pop and R&B charts? When broadcasts of Frank Capra's copyright-orphaned *It's a Wonderful Life* blanketed the late-night holiday schedules of independent TV stations across the UHF spectrum? (Remember independent TV stations?) Those master metaparodists at the Troubadour Theatre Company commemorate both Wonders in this genre-twisting musical lampoon. Director Matt Walker has updated the more topical gags in this show, originally staged in 2003, while remaining faithful to the original production's winning blend of broad caricature, knockabout clowning and comically inspired production numbers, all scored to the Wonder songbook (albeit with the group's cleverly reworked lyrics). Wonder's anachronistic, ultra-urban sound brilliantly places Capra's white, middle-American melodramatics in high satiric relief. Doubling as the evening's MC and its hapless hero, George Bailey, Walker sets the comic pace with a wickedly funny impersonation of Jimmy Stewart's signature Midwestern Everyman, in a vintage Afro wig. Equally fine are Erin Matthews as George's wide-eyed love interest, Mary; and Jen Seifert, whose sexually overcharged Violet makes Gloria Grahame's town tramp look like a nun. Nearly stealing the show, however, is Morgan Russler's Mr. Potter, with his dead-on skewering of Lionel Barrymore's growled scene chewing. The house band faithfully renders Wonder's soulful melodies, while the company retains enough Capra corn to jerk tears, as well as laughs, alongside the maestro. Falcon Theater, 4252 Riverside Dr., Burbank; Wed.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 4 & 7 p.m.; through January 4. (818) 955-8101. Troubadour Theatre Company.

Wednesdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 4 & 8 p.m.; Sundays, 4 & 7 p.m. Starts: Dec. 12. Continues through Jan. 4, 2008

