



December 11, 2016:
Little Drummer Bowie reviewed by Rob Stevens



The cast (photo by Sasha A. Venola)

Classical music composer Katherine Kennicott Davis wrote the song "The Little Drummer Boy" AKA "Carol of the Drum," based on a traditional Czech carol, in 1941. The Trapp Family Singers (remember they escaped the Nazis by climbing the Alps) recorded it in 1951 and made it a popular tune, recorded by virtually every singer since including Johnny Cash, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix, The Jackson Five and on and on to Justin Bieber. In 1968 Rankin/Bass Productions created a stop-motion animated television special based on the song that has become a holiday perennial and even generated a sequel in 1976. It's been nearly 50 years since that TV special and now The Troubies AKA Troubadour Theater Company has put their own special twist on the tale. As usual, they have combined a classical tale with pop music and the result is *Little Drummer Bowie* at the Falcon Theatre in Burbank.



Riccardo Berdini (photo by Sherry Greezmiel)

The fun starts immediately when Ali (Beth Kennedy), sidekick to a Middle Eastern magician and showman, introduces Ben Harnamed (Riccardo Berdini) whose pyrotechnics fail to ignite on cue. A very pregnant Mary (Lisa Valenzuela) and her husband Joseph (Rick Batalla) are seen on their way to Bethlehem. Ziggy Stardust (Joseph Leo Bwarie), a very misanthropic glam rocker, and his only friends, the sheep Babaa (Katie Kitani) and donkey Samson (Cloie Wyatt Taylor), tell his sad story in flashback. He was given a drum, named Major Tom (you can see what song that's leading to) on his eighth birthday, which also happened to be the day his family was killed. Harnamed and Ali convince Ziggy to join their troupe of performers and achieve "Fame." Other classic Bowie songs get the Troubie treatment

—“Let’s Dance” leads to tap dancing, “Young Americans” become “Young Arabians” given the setting.



Rick Battala, Katie DeShan, Niles Rivers (photo by Sasha A. Venola)

The cast, for the first time without Artistic Director and Chief Clown in Residence Matt Walker, includes a few first timers but they fit right into the merry improv making shenanigans led by long time and able farceurs Kennedy and Batalla. Many play multiple roles with quick costume changes that add to the fun. Bwarie has the perfect rock style voice to knock out these songs, but then the whole cast seems to have musical as well as comical chops. The laughs come non-stop from this group. My favorite Troubie twists were when the shepherds showed up with Little Bowie Peep (Katie DeShan) and the appearance of the Three Kings—Don King (Niles Rivers), Larry King (Batalla) and Billie Jean King (Kennedy).



Rick Battala, Beth Kennedy, Niles Rivers (photo by Sasha A. Venola)

Walker is heard as The Voice From Above and co-directed the fast-paced show along with Bwarie. Eric Heinly served as musical director/conductor as well as drummer and proved to be a triple threat as the six-piece on stage band really rocked the music. *Little Drummer Bowie* should be added to your list of holiday must-sees.



Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Dr. in Burbank. Ends Jan. 15.
www.falcontheatre.com or 818-955-8101

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