

THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOWIE

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WOW!

Ziggy Stardust, aka The Little Drummer Bowie, is back in town, in Toluca Lake to be specific, as The Troubadour Theater Company revives its 2005 holiday musical smash with a fresh new script and a superstar lead performance by Falcon Theatre returnee (and Jersey Boy extraordinaire) Joseph Leo Bwarie in the title role.



Like the 1968 animated TV special that inspired it, The Little Drummer Bowie has only the wispiest of plots. (Orphaned people-hating percussionist learns the meaning of Christmas in Bethlehem, Year Zero.)

Unlike The Little Drummer *Boy*, however, The Little Drummer BOWIE features over a dozen David Bowie hits, virtually all of them performed full-length, making it quite possibly the most song-filled Troubies show ever.



A full-cast "Ziggy Stardust" introduces us to "King Of The Desert Showman" Ben Hared (Riccardo Berdini) and his androgynous sidekick Ali (Beth Kennedy), a pair of furry desert creatures (Katie Kitani as Babaa The Sheep and Cloie Wyatt Taylor as Samson The Donkey), a couple more "who were good-looking, played multiple roles, and had Arabic names" (Katie DeShan as Nadiyah and Niles Rivers as Jamal), and of course our hero, parentless glam rocker Ziggadiah, Ziggy for short, whose mop of orange hair and "serious eye makeup, sponsored by Mac Cosmetics" suggest a boy who marches to the beat of his own drum.

At one time the happiest kid in the desert, and never more so than on his eighth birthday when Mom (Lisa Valenzuela as Mary) served up chocolate cake with baba ghanoush frosting and gave her son his very own drum, Ziggy finds his life changed the day "unsavory characters" show up to leave him minus Mom, Dad (Rick Batalla as Joseph), drum, and love of humanity.



Since 2007, Steven Stanley's StageSceneLA.com has spotlighted the best in Southern California theater via reviews, interviews, and its annual StageSceneLA Scenies.

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Soon enough, however, Ziggy finds himself recruited for the Ben Hamed Show Of Shows, and unable to resist the lure of money, power, and (song cue!) "Fame," the carrot-topped drummer boy abandons Babaa and Samson for life in the showbiz fast lane.

The Little Drummer Bowie's 2016 reprise cuts a few characters from the original, adds others, and because times have changed since '05, scores laughs from contemporary pop references to (among others) the Samsung Note 7, Hamilton and Mike Pence, Kanye, Empire, Game Of Thrones, and a certain tax-evading hotel owner-turned-politician.



Along the way Ziggy meets talent rep John Jacob Jingleheimer Shmahoola-Goldberg (Rick Batalla), a trio of Kings (Rivers as Don, Batalla as Larry, and Kennedy as Billie Jean), and a sheep-herding threesome (Battalla, Rivers, and DeShan as Bo Peep).

Most importantly for this boy in search of love and family, The Little Drummer Bowie rediscovers his heart.

"Fame," "Golden Years," "Let's Dance," "Changes," "Modern Love," and many, many more. If there's a David Bowie song you love, you'll likely hear it performed in The Little Drummer Boy by as sensational a cast as I've seen in a Troubies show,

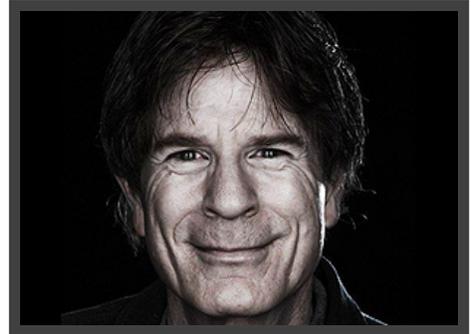
Backed by musical director/arranger Eric Heinly and his onstage band, the nifty ninesome reveal dance chops to match their power pipes in production numbers choreographed with abundant pizzazz by Jordana Toback. (Special snaps to Kitani and Wyatt's tap-dancing Babaa and Samson.)

Troubies head honcho Matt Walker appears only on Memorex as "The Voice From Above" but co-directs with Bwarie like the mad genius he is,



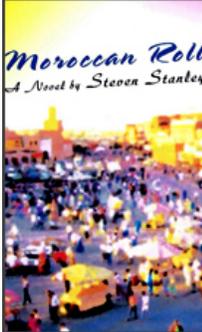
Batalla once again adlibs (or pretend adlibs) like a master, fellow Troubie treasures Kennedy and Valenzuela are their patented brilliant selves, newbies Taylor and Kitani could not make for a more adorable animal duo, DeShan and Rivers dazzle in one character, costume and accent after another, and Italian musical theater hottie Berdini shows off Jean Valjean vocals along with multiple feats of prestidigitation.

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As editor of StageSceneLA.com, Steven Stanley is one of Los Angeles' most prolific theater reviewers. He is also the author of *Moroccan Roll*, and an ESL instructor in the English Language Program at California State University, Los Angeles since 1979. [\(read more\)](#)

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Above all there is Bwarie's charismatic star turn as Ziggy, the Jersey Boys record-setter (2000+ performances as Frankie Valli) winning audience hearts from the get-go with Broadway charisma and a voice this side of the red planet, speaking of which, just wait till you hear Bwarie's emotion-packed "Life On Mars," his exquisite "Wild Is The Wind," and his heartstrings-pulling "Peace On Earth" (featuring a snippet of "The Little Drummer Boy" if you listen carefully).



Scenic designer Christopher Scott Murillo gives The Little Drummer Bowie one of the best Troubies sets ever, providing a Biblical backup to Sharon McGunigle's latest brilliant bunch of costumes both historical and hysterical and Bobbie Zlotnik's equally fabulous wigs.

JM Montecalvo's lighting, Daniel Tator's sound design, John Stapleton's makeup design, and Lily Bartenstein's properties complete an all-around terrific production design.

Skylar Johnson is associate lighting designer and Anna Aimee White is associate choreographer. Casting is by Sandy Logan, CSA. Corey Womack is production stage manager.

It wouldn't be Christmas at the Falcon without the Troubies, and The Little Drummer Bowie is the Troubies at their uniquely entertaining best. Reserve your tickets asap because like Bwarie's sizzler of a Ziggy, they'll sure to be the hottest in town.



Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank. Through January 15. Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at 8:00. Saturdays at 4:00 and 8:00. Sundays at 4:00 and 7:00. Also Tuesdays December 13 and 30 at 8:00. No performances on December 24, 25, and 31 or January 1. Reservations: 818 955-8101

www.FalconTheatre.com

—Steven Stanley
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Photos: Sasha A. Venola

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