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Little Drummer Bowie

by Dale Reynolds
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Joseph Leo Bwarie, Beth Kennedy

The Troubies are back, and they put the late songwriter, British David Bowie, into their laugh-out-loud headlights, a second time to get it right. And "**Little Drummer Bowie**" is par for their particular mindset. Whenever The Troubadours perform at the intimate Falcon Theatre in Toluca Lake, they sell out practically the entire run, which makes them a rarity: critic-proof theater.

So, depending on how much you know of the successful singer's oeuvre -- much or nothing (me!) -- you will have much to laugh at. This revised production mashes up the 1960s animation, "Little Drummer Boy" and Bowie's iconic glam rock sound, with a nod to Bowie's historic teaming up

with Bing Crosby on the hit 1982 remake of the Christmas classic.

The entertaining nine performers are pitch-perfect (in all respects): singing, dancing, ad-libbing, involving the audience in their shenanigans, etc. There's no plot, as such, but the story... sorta... concerns a red fright-wigged actor, Ziggy (Joseph Leo Bwarie in glorious voice), his mother and father (Mary and Joseph), three visiting kings -- Don, Larry and Billy Jean (don't ask!), his animal escorts (yeah, it's weird -- so what?!) named Baba da Cat (Katie Kitani) and Samson de Donkey (Cloie Wyatt Taylor), and his interactions with an Arabic self-promoter, Ben Hamed (Italian import Ricardo Berdini), and his assistant Ali (Beth Kennedy). Lisa Valenzuela and Rick Batalla play a variety of oddities -- all of it beautifully.

This is a fearless company (headed by Matt Walker) who willingly drop the script to ad lib audience lateness, or Donald Trump's follies, or scatological body functions. Not everything clicks, of course, but it's all usually very funny. Walker and Bwarie co-directed with enormous glee and let-looseness that entertains mightily.

The level of singing is top-drawer, as is the choreography of Jordana Toback, and, most efficiently, the band, led by Eric Heiny on drums, with Kevin McCourt on keyboards, BJ Johnson on bass, Mike Abraham on guitar and Kirsten Edkins and Ashley Jarmack on reeds, which takes the Bowie sound to excellent new places. Some of the dozen or so songs they adapted are "Golden Years," "Space Oddity," "Wild is the Wind," "Mars," and "Ch-Ch-Change."

It's all terribly silly, eminently forgettable but deeply entertaining. Glad to have visited with them yet again.

"Little Drummer Bowie" plays through January 15, 2017 at the Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive, Toluca Lake, 91505. For tickets or information, call 818-955-8101 or visit www.falcontheatre.com.



Holidays 2016

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