



Troubies End Summer with A Wither's Tale

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by Don Grigware



A Wither's Tale

based on Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* with the music of Bill Withers conceived & produced by the Troubadour Theater Company directed by Matt Walker Falcon Theatre through September 26

I have written many times over that you should always *expect the unexpected* in a

Troubies' production, but with **A Wither's Tale** they go a giant step beyond. This piece is so radically different in style from their normal parodies, at least the first part. Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* was called a "problematic" play because the first three acts have intense psychological drama and the last two, comedy with a happy ending. It caused critics to relabel it from comedy to 'romance'. Likewise, the Troubies become so deadly serious in the first half of this show that I honestly felt I was watching a first-rate Shakespearean representation of the play - with only an occasional gag or joke afoot to ensure the Troubies label.

Plotwise, in brief, King Leontes (Matt Walker) suspects infidelity from his wife Hermione (Monica Schneider) and his best friend Polixenes (Matt Merchant). He condemns Hermione to prison where she gives birth to a daughter that Leontes refuses to accept as his own. He wants her destroyed, but gives in to Antigonus' (Travis Clark) wishes to save the child. Antigonus braves rough waters and takes the child away and abandons it. After an Oracle (Lisa Valenzuela) declares that Leontes was mistaken and that Hermione is innocent and completely loyal, Leontes begs forgiveness, but it is too late as both Hermione and son Mamillius have died. Leontes must live alone in repentance and misery. Eighteen years pass and the girl



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Perdita (Katherine Malak) grows up, falls in love with Polixenes' son Florizel (Brandon Breault) and eventually returns to her father's kingdom to marry and reunite in peace with her repentant father.

Matt Walker leads an astounding ensemble and proves once and for all just how intensely versatile an actor he really is. As the jealous King Leontes he delivers a strong and impetuous portrait displaying fantastic dramatic range. His breakdown, that follows the Oracle's proclamation, is painfully real and disturbing. A truly great performance! Walker also plays a clown in the segment where Perdita grows up on a distant island. He is true to comic form here, as he cavorts and carries on with great humorous style. Dynamic versatility is also displayed from Beth Kennedy who plays Paulina, friend to Hermione, very straight out and serious in the first half and then in the second part a toothless Shepherd who discovers the abandoned child. Kennedy, in typical fashion, never disappoints - a wonderful actress, straight or hilarious, as the play demands. Valenzuela also performing double duty as son Mamillus and the Oracle sings beautifully, and introducing the piece 'through a child's eyes' incorporates a great sense of fun and frolic. Valenzuela is another Troubie who delivers the goods as does Mike Sulprizio, more subdued here as servant Camillo. Malak as Perdita is wonderfully nimble and sings divinely. Brandon Breault, Travis Clark, Matt Merchant, Joseph Keane as the **Green Eyed Monster**, et al ... do terrific work.

Wither's hit songs like "Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone", "Lean On Me", "Just the Two of Us", "Use Me Up" and "A Lovely Day" are all delivered up gleefully with typical Troubie energy and joy. Mike Jespersen's functional set with French doors and red curtains used to uncover various stages of the plot and Sharon McGunigle's colorful period costumes serve quite effectively.

Director Walker has well balanced the action, minimizing the humor in the first half and building it up in the second to match the traditional style of the Bard within this play. This is a stellar evening of theatre with one great surprise that proves ... the Troubies rise to any occasion. The quintessential acting troupe ...they are once again in rare form!