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LOS ANGELES

by Sharon Perlmutter

As U2 Like It

It probably isn't completely accurate to purport to *review* the Troubadour Theater Company's production of *As U2 Like It*. After all, the mix of Shakespeare and U2 songs (with slightly modified lyrics) is spiced up with a healthy dose of improv—so what I saw on opening night very likely won't be what you'll see at another performance.

Sure, director Matt Walker, on stage as Touchstone (a fitting role for the master of the revelry) will most likely throw his scarf on the stage at some point (a flag on the play, if you will) and charge a "penalty" against someone who misses a cue, can't recover from a laughing fit, or otherwise strays a little bit too far from what we'll loosely call "the script." But who will actually receive that penalty, and for what, is something that only the Fates can foresee. Odds are, though, you'll be laughing right along with the spontaneous merriment.



**Matt Walker, Beth Kennedy, Audrey Siegel,
Matthew Morgan and Mike Sulprizio**

But what makes *As U2 Like It* really splendid is that, right beneath all the humor, there's a surprisingly solid production of the play itself. Don't get me wrong, the script doesn't exactly hew closely to the text, but the Troubies' understanding of *As You Like It* is strong, solid and complete. The result is a production which presents a better picture of the characters and their relationships than many other productions which play their Shakespeare straight.

Take Rosalind and Orlando, the lovers of the piece. The production acknowledges, out loud, that they're young and pretty—and that they're falling in love having only seen each other once. But once the show has acknowledged this weakness in the plot, it can keep using it to get laughs. Oliver, Orlando's brother, also says right up front that he's "eee-vil" (a fact made apparent because he's wearing "evil eyebrows"—which, on opening night,

malfunctioned in the first scene, resulting in actor Rick Batalla nearly walking off with the show before it even started). And somehow—through exaggerated costuming and memorable stage business—Audrey Siegel and Matthew Morgan manage to make Phebe and Silvius the comic relief of the play, which is a tall order given that everyone else is pretty darned funny anyway.

But where the Troubies really nail things is in Beth Kennedy's portrayal of Jaques. Dressed in black and wearing white face (when nobody else is), Jaques stands out as the melancholy counterpart to Walker's clownish Touchstone. Jaques doesn't dance when everyone around him is boogying to "The Sweetest Thing." And Kennedy's delivery of the Seven Ages of Man isn't just *good*, it's character-defining. For, while her Jaques is a bit of a ham and can't wait to jump into the speech whenever he can, her actual recitation of it goes a great distance to explaining *why* Jaques never smiles in the first place. It's a stunning bit to find in the middle of all this singing, dancing and low-brow comedy—but maybe it takes singing, dancing and low-brow comedy surrounding Jaques to really bring out why a man like that can't bring himself to participate.

Seven Ages is probably the longest block of uninterrupted Shakespearean dialogue in this thing. (In *Arden*, the Duke ends nearly every line with a blissful, vaguely pot-induced, "Man.") But the story is there, the characters are there, and the emotions are there. *And* they rock out. What more can you possibly ask for?

As U2 Like It runs in repertory at the Falcon Theatre in Burbank through October 12, 2008. For tickets and information, see www.falcontheatre.com.

The Falcon Theatre presents the Troubadour Theater Company in *As U2 Like It*. Set Designer Sherry Santillano; Lighting Designer Nick McCord; Costume Designer Sharon McGunigle; Sound Designer Robert Arturo Ramirez; Stage Manager Corey Womack; Musical Director Eric Heinly; Producer Mike Sulprizio; Choreographer Christine Lakin; Directed by Matt Walker.

Cast:

Oliver – Rick Batalla
Dennis – Travis Clark
Jaques – Beth Kennedy
Phebe – Audrey Siegel
Orlando – Matt Merchant
Silvius – Matthew Morgan
Celia – Katie Nunez
Rosalind – Breanna Pine
Duke Frederick/Duke Senior – Mike Sulprizio
Touchstone – Matt Walker
Charles – Dan Waskom
Katherine – Kimberly Wood

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