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## It's a Stevie Wonderful Life



It's as nostalgic as eggnog, more dependable than holiday lights, and can be found on every TV station like Santa Claus on a swing shift in every shopping mall across the country. The classic background noise of the season, Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life" starring James Stewart and Donna Reed gets a fresh beat with the unlikely pairing of Stevie Wonder hits and the zany, improvisation comedic styling of The Troubadour Theatre Company at the Falcon Theatre in Burbank.

Back by popular demand to a sold out audience on opening night for its third season in a row, the former good filler film of the year becomes a groovy extravaganza of hysterical hijinks, spectacular choreography and good old fashioned honey-baked ham slapstick fun.

Artistic director Matt Walker unleashes this side-splitting parody with plenty of retooled pop culture references that makes this film and this show timelier than ever. Taking liberal punches at the current economic crisis, the pending bailouts of corporate America, and the Tribune bankruptcy, Walker manages to squeeze in playful jibes at Plaxico, Palin, a cardboard cut-out of, (which amounts to a cameo) McCain, and even likening Falcon Theatre founder Garry Marshall (also in attendance) to God (performing as Himself). Everything it seems is up for grabs and nothing is sacred to the film in this re-mastering, especially if you remember the famous line, "Whenever a bell rings an angel gets its wings," is delivered by a little girl on a Nyquil drunk bender.

Between pushing the limits of good taste, the show features some of Wonder's jazziest tunes such as a Charleston styled "Sir Duke," Chippendale inspired "Part-Time Lover," and the show stopping "Superstitious" performed in black light with Walker and a pair of dancers flying through the air while a clown on stilts does some major krumping onstage. Other memorable numbers include "My Cherie Amore" and "Ribbon in the Sky." Expertly choreographed by Ameenah Kaplan and Christine Lakin, the ensemble numbers are top notch with a solid execution by the cast.

Throwing in every silly sight gag and wild prop comedy imaginable such as disco balls, pajamas,

airplanes, ever-growing Afro wigs and even the euphemistic kitchen sink -- although strangely enough rubber chicken didn't make the cut -- this show hits everything on the nose and gets plenty of knee-slapp laughs from the audience and the cast. Even Walker and his hilarious troupe can't keep a straight face during his overly creaking and crowing impersonation of Jimmy Stewart, or the improvisational licenses taken by the main characters throughout the show that are just as funny as the scripted scenes.

Sometimes a show of this ilk can milk the humor so much in the first act that it wears thin by the second. Not here. If anything the second act is better than the first. A tall order given the absolute lack of a fourth wall, the hilarious set up of the characters and the sheer momentum of a show that never misses an opportunity to poke fun at themselves, the audience or the lampooned film. Using a video screen for a live taping of Bailey's home set in the lighting booth proves to be an indispensable tool for the "Cops" montage that incorporates every bizarre scenario possible from backstage to the theatre's parking lot. Just when it seems impossible to be any funnier, the show trumps itself and finds more ways to stuff this holiday comedy complete with all the trimmings.

With the exception of Walker as George, there are no standouts, and this is as it should be. Every actor works in complete synchronicity and the ensemble gives as good as they get, each taking splendid turns upstaging one another while holding their own. Every beloved character from the film gets a new spin from Rick Batalla's Latinized Joe Pesci-like Clarence, to Morgan Rusler's toupee-topped Potter wheeling and dealing from his pimped out wheelchair pushed around by a pair of sexy nurses. Inspired by Brecht and the Commedia delle Arte, The Troubadour Troupe pulls out all the stops for a holly show that is sure to become a staple among locals looking for an offbeat escape from the regular Christmas trope. With Stevie Wonder licks and a whole lot of laughs this version of "It's a Wonderful Life" is a wonderful way to spend an evening, but word to the wise, don't drink much before the show unless you have a change of pants.

"It's a Stevie Wonderful Life"

The Falcon Theatre

4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank

Runs through Sunday Jan 4th

Wed through Sat at 8pm

Sundays at 4pm & 7pm

PH: 818-955-8101

[www.FalconTheatre.com](http://www.FalconTheatre.com)

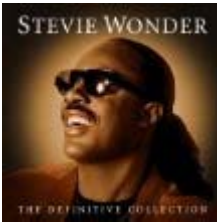
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