

BAT BOY REVIEW

Life is easier as either a dazzling diva with charms that can suck the chrome of a trailer hitch or as some thunderbuns dude whose musky manliness leaves nuns weak in the knees and pondering kicking the habit. Yet, it's who you really are that counts, right?

So geez; half boy, half furry flying nocturnal rodent; what's a "Bat Boy" to do?

"Bat Boy: The Musical" (BB-TM) is based on a recurring character spawned and spread by the Weekly World News, a notorious tabloid (aka bird and puppy piddle litter).

George Maguire, Artistic Director of the impressive Solano College Theatre (SCT) team, has done it again. Campy, over the top BB-TM is a must see, high energy, too funny to be embarrassed romp that delivers a heck of a bite-and that ain't no guano.

Bat Boy, half-boy and half-bat, is found in a cave in the Appalachian hick town Hope Falls. In hope of re-kindling wifely romantic duties, the local vet adopts the creature, his wife names him Edgar and soon the latter-day "Lisa Bat-Little" is wowing all with his socialization. Yet a foreboding mystery hangs over this little burgh. Spoiler alert, I have no intention of telling you what happens next! Let's just say, there's incest, bigotry, violence, furry feral fecundity and puppet shows. Yep, all the essential ingredients of a PG-13 Broadway show

BB-TB's ribald recipe is filled with hysterical small town caricatures, clever dialogue, tortuous tabloid plot twists and more than a brush of sincerity, pathos and lesson learning. This high energy production (think Rent) is what musical theater troopers love to sink their fangs into complete with zany doubling of roles, gender bending and outrageous visual gags

The score, professionally performed by a live five piece offstage ensemble, is classic pastiche employing light-hearted, respectful tongue-in-cheek imitation of others' style. Thus, there is something for everyone with toe tapping, praising and preaching or just getting down with your groove thing as songs weave through rap, folk ballad, hoe down, gospel, and pop. Bubble-gum melodies with crisp clever lyrics twirl and whirl with soaring Sondheim dissonance and caffeinated Rock Opera. And when the preacher gets to preaching, you best get up and get religion-you'll see.

The PG 13 humor drips from lyrics and libretto alike in a sizzling funny show. Off the wall Monty Pythonesque irreverence is in one hysterical number where mythical Pan, the 'Spirit of the Forest', croons and encourages Bat Boy, his forbidden sweetheart and associated amorous furry friends in "Children, Children," (that) "The Earth's asleep, time to wake it/If you have clothing, forsake it/We want you breathless, and naked,"

Keep a light on and hold the mail because you're leaving home and entering Maguire's and friends minds. SCT puts on a clinic in mastering the imagination in terms of set, sound, costume and lighting. Blocking and choreography are excellent and off- action pacing is very sharp.

Seth Michael Andersen as bat boy is remarkably consistent and capable with caged, preternaturally limber, feral and convulsive movements reminiscent of Peewee Herman off his meds. We feel his pain and beware his bite. Barbara McFadden, a Solano stage staple, is the villainous vets' too concerned tender and tormented wife who probably has a dark secret of her own. McFadden, I guess that's Irish or Scotch for consummate professionalism, stage presence and serious vocal chops. Her daughter Shelley is aptly portrayed by Kat McFadden as a callow mid adolescent, replete with eye- rolling, foot-stomping and a flare for the dramatic. Paul C. Plain plays an evilly jealous sycophantic Dr. Parker with adept and malicious malfeasance. The supporting cast, many cross-dressing, is solid.

Watch this name-John Rivard, a scene stealing, gender bending, role doubling, twinkle toed powerhouse countertenor who lives for the footlights-and Lordly can that man preach!

The cartoon like conclusion strains credibility. Perfect! Hope Falls may be "no place to raise cattle" but SCT is a place to love a bat boy, both on stage and perhaps a bit in us all. Besides, cartoons pose some of the best social commentary, so I wonder, "Although you can take the boy out of the bat cave, can you take the bite out of the bat?"

Four stars

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