

# The Fantasticks

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Cast. Photo by Sherry Barnett.

Edmond Rostand's 1894 play *The Romancers* (*Les Romanesques*) was the inspiration for Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones' musical *The Fantasticks*. (Rostand's conceit was itself a convolution of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.) *The Fantasticks* premiered Off-Broadway in 1960 and ran for 17,162 performances, that's 42 years – making it the longest-playing musical in the history of the world. With memorable and hummable songs such as *Try to Remember*, *Plant a Radish*, and *Round and Round*, *The Fantasticks* was recognized with a Tony Award in 1991 for Excellence in Theatre.

Because it is also the most widely produced musical of all time, *The Fantasticks* has become familiar to a wide variety of theatergoers. What's more, the musical has also been filmed for the cinema (released in 2000) and made into a television event (a 1964 Hallmark Hall of Fame production).

Now the Good People's Theater Company is paying homage to the Schmidt (music) and Jones (book & lyrics) collaboration that resulted in this masterwork. Meticulously directed by Janet Miller, with exquisite musical direction by Corey Hirsh (Hirsh mans the keyboard, while Jillian Risigari-Gai plays the harp as if on loan from heaven above).

With a game cast of eight, the plot involves two fathers – Hucklebee (Matt Stevens in a charming turn as the boy's father) and Bellomy (Michael P. Wallot in an equally endearing portrayal as the girl's dad). These sires seem to be mortal enemies. But, in fact, their enmity is a mere ruse meant to lead their respective children into matrimony (ergo the duet sung beautifully by the daddies, *Plant a Radish*).

The mysterious El Gallo serves as the narrator of the proceedings (Christopher Karbo's baritone vocals are enchanting). He explains that two youngsters, in love, are living next to one another but divided by a tall wall (Matt played by Matt Franta is exemplary as the "callow young fellow," while Audrey Curd is delightful as lovelorn Luisa). The lush tune *Try to Remember* serves as El Gallo's inciting musical number.

When El Gallo hatches a checkered scheme to have Luisa kidnapped in order to allow Matt to come to the rescue, he enlists two hardscrabble thespians to enact the supposedly treacherous deed. Henry, the demented Shakespearean and his sidekick Mortimer, who specializes in dying scenes, are the contracted kidnappers (Joey D'Auria and Corky Loupe, respectively, are truly scene stealers with their top-notch and over-the-top performances).

With comedic combustibility, combined with moving musical numbers, *The Fantasticks* is a show that has something for everyone. There's plenty of merriment and laugh-inducing antics (look to the characters Henry and Mortimer to put the guffaws into high gear), but there's also some tear-inducing moments made poignant through Schmidt and Jones' captivating score. In short, the Good People Theater Company's staging of *The Fantasticks* makes for a joyful experience in the theater.

*"The Fantasticks" plays through June 29 at Hollywood's Lillian Theater. It's located at 1076 Lillian Way (at Santa Monica Boulevard). Performance times vary, with a mixture of matinees and evening shows. For details and online ticketing, visit [www.goodpeopletheatercompany.org](http://www.goodpeopletheatercompany.org).*