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LOS ANGELES

by Sharon Perlmutter

The Fantasticks Good People Theater Company

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Last year, Good People Theater Company burst onto the L.A. theatre scene at the Hollywood Fringe Festival with an honest, beautiful production of *A Man of No Importance*, which reduced me, not just to tears, but to genuine shoulder-shaking sobs. For its return to the Fringe, Good People aims not so much for sobs, but sniffles, with a production of *The Fantasticks*.

It's a much less ambitious production. With a show that nearly everyone knows, and a production that looks to go back to the basics, there is nothing particularly unique or notable here. It's just a sweet little show in a sweet little production.

It does try to paint a picture. My notes are full of words and phrases like "charming," "wistful," and "old-fashioned." Christopher Karbo's El Gallo is a gentle soul; even when he's intentionally hurting the Boy and Girl, there's a tenderness about him. Matt Stevens and Michael P. Wallot, as the not-really-feuding fathers, are similarly kind; even when they're angry and want to rebuild the wall between their homes, there's no real malice there. The music is provided solely by music director Corey Hirsch on the keyboard and Jillian Risigari-Gai on an onstage harp. (And, of course, the production has gone with the "abduction" language in "It Depends on What You Pay," rather than the more discomfiting "rape" version.) Everything seems geared to painting a delicate romantic picture.

And it is delicate. At the production reviewed, an audience member's cell phone went off at a stunningly inappropriate moment early in the second act. The players tried to hold the moment while the phone continued ringing; the patron dug the ringing phone from his pocket and exited the



Audrey Curd and Christopher Karbo

theatre with it, and I am *sure* I wasn't the only one hoping El Gallo (or, in retrospect, the Mute) would rip the offending mobile out of his hands and lock it in the onstage trunk for the duration. But, in a way, the fact that the phone call completely destroyed the spell the show was casting served to underline the fact that theatrical magic was actually taking place. It was a fragile, all too easily destructible magic, but, right there, just before that phone went off, young love was fading in the unforgiving light of day, and a world-weary villain was deciding that *this* love was worth saving, despite the emotional cost.

Not all of the production has such beauty. Matt Franta and Audrey Curd reflect little more than annoying innocence as the young lovers; Joey D'Auria and Corky Loupé earn few laughs as the old actors; and Alix Rikki Ogawa, as the Mute, has less involvement in the production than others have had in the role. (The people sitting behind me thought she was the stage manager.) Still, one can't disregard the charm of the show, and it's always a delight to hear a musical sung without amplification.

Good People Theater Company presents *The Fantasticks*. Book and lyrics by Tom Jones; Music by Harvey Schmidt. Scenic Design Robert Schroeder; Lighting/Stage Manager Katherine Barrett; Costume Design Kathy Gillespie; Casting Michael P. Wallot; Marketing Kimberly Fox; Music Director Corey Hirsch; Director Janet Miller.

The Fantasticks runs through June 29, 2014, at the Lillian Theater as part of the Hollywood Fringe Festival. For tickets and information, see www.hff14.org/1513

Cast:

The Narrator - El Gallo: Christopher Karbo
The Girl - Luisa: Audrey Curd
The Boy - Matt: Matt Franta
The Boy's Father - Hucklebee: Matt Stevens
The Girl's Father - Bellomy: Michael P. Wallot
The Old Actor - Henry: Joey D'Auria
The Man Who Dies - Mortimer: Corky Loupé
The Mute: Alix Rikki Ogawa

Photo: Sherry Barnett

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