



A Fantasticks Recreation

By Steven Sabel

It is billed as “the original fringe musical,” and when *The Fantasticks* debuted off-Broadway in 1960 it became an instant counter culture musical sensation. For anyone who has yet to experience this charming little musical, and for those who have an affinity for the work, [Good People Theater Company's](#) production as part of the 2014 [Hollywood Fringe Festival](#) is sure to please.

Producer and director Janet Miller stages an accurate reproduction of this classic piece of witty and creative musical theater with a cast that, for the most part, embodies the spirit of the original work. The raw and bare-bones nature of the piece almost completely lays the task of capturing an audience at the feet of the performers, and many of the members of the cast conquer the challenge.

Christopher Karbo leads the ensemble in the inimitable role of El Gallo, who serves as both storyteller and rascally participant in the plot. Though a bit light at the start, Karbo lends a full and rich baritone voice to the vocals, as well as an endearing roguish charm required of the character throughout his performance. His delivery of the *Try To Remember* reprise at the close of the show, sends audiences home humming the hit tune with a smile.

Matt Stevens (Hucklebee) and Michael P. Wallot (Bellomy) present a delightful counter to Karbo's intensity as the two plotting fathers of the ingénue love interests. Delivering clean harmony together with *Never Say No*, and again in the humorous song and dance number, *Plant A Radish*, Stevens and Wallot both bring an entertaining vibrant energy to their roles. Their teaming with Karbo for *It Depends on What You Pay* is a highlight of the production.

By design of the original book by Tom Jones, actors Joey D'Auria as “The Old Actor,” Henry, and Corky Loupe as Mortimer, “The Man Who Dies,” carry the bulk of the comic relief with broad shoulders perfectly suited to the hilarity of their scenes. This Smothers Brothers duo practices keen comic timing and sound delivery that serves as the cream topping over a well-baked pie of physical comedy.

Audry Curd (Luisa) and Matt Franta (Matt) are called upon to present the heart of the plot, but never seem to hit the level of exuberance required of the young adolescent love of this *Romeo and Juliet* tale. Both Curd and Franta deliver solo vocals just shy of their mark, and never quite present the harmonious sound together that is expected from these lovers.

An unsung heroine of the production is Alix Rikki Ogawa in the role of The Mute, who serves as more than a deft facilitator of many of the prop and set changing needs of the production, but also plays her role as near sidekick to El Gallo.

Costumes by Kathy Gillespie present an accurately conceived animated appearance to the characters. Lighting design by Katherine Barrett serves well to help transport the audience through space and time on the traditional basic set in this black box production. Music director Corey Hirsch on piano, and harpist Jillian Risigari-Gai provide the musical accompaniment that sometimes threatens to overpower vocals presented without amplification. At times, Risigari-Gai succeeds in developing her harp into another character on the stage.

***The Fantasticks*, Lillian Theatre, 1076 Lillian Way, Hollywood. Through June 29. Tickets: \$20. www.goodpeopletheaterco.org. 323-455-4585.**


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About the Author: Steven Sabel has more than 30 years experience in theatre production, including nearly 20 years in production management. He is an award-winning producer and director with more than 95 successful productions to his credit. He also served for 12 years as a community journalist and newspaper editor, and he has 14 years experience as a theatre arts instructor: www.bardforkids.com. His independent production company, STS Productions, has produced successful theatrical ventures in a wide variety of venues for nearly 20 years. In 2010, Steven founded the Archway Theatre in the DTLA Arts District, where he serves as producing artistic director. As the founding artistic director of the Redlands Shakespeare Festival, Steven managed the creation and foundation of the organization from the ground up, and has served as both artistic director and executive director of the thriving organization for nine successful seasons. During his tenure, the Redlands Shakespeare Festival has produced 23 successful full-scale theatrical productions, including 19 Shakespearean titles, more than 25 professional lectures, more than 40 educational workshops, and more than 50 educational school-site presentations.

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