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by **Don Grigware** June 10 <http://www.broadwayworld.com/los-angeles/article/BWW-Reviews-Good-People-Theater-Company-Stays-Loyal-to-THE-FANTASTICKS-20140610#.U5gCKaXIXTS>



The Fantasticks/book & lyrics by [Tom Jones](#)/music by [Harvey Schmidt](#)/directed by [Janet Miller](#)/Good People Theater Company/at The Lillian Theatre/through June 29

The longest running musical in the world *The Fantasticks* is always at its best when produced and performed with simplicity. It was first produced at the Hollywood Fringe in 1959 simplistically. When I first saw it in New York, it was performed in a cabaret space against a brick wall. You can't get much simpler than that. Those that have tried to produce it on a grander scale have distorted or literally *ruined* it. In their new production to help open the Hollywood Fringe Festival 2014, [Janet Miller](#) and the Good People Theater Company keep it lovingly simple, calling it a "pristine revival" and as such, this, their third show in a row comes up a surefire winner.

Based on a short play by [Edmond Rostand](#) called *Les Romanesques* or *The Romancers*, *The Fantasticks* has an old-world European flavor in its retelling of *Pyramus and Thisbe* and *Romeo and Juliet*, replete with melodramatic elements, but light, never overbearing. Invoking the mood of a pastorate or rustic musical play popular in the 16th century, it is meant for a small stage and small orchestra. Miller utilizes the concept almost to the letter, relying on a keyboard (Corey Hirsch) and adding a harp (Jillian Risigari-Gai), which brings a gloriously ethereal quality to the fore. Since the word 'tableau' is used to describe the portrait of the two families with El Gallo (Christopher Karbo) in the middle, serving as a connecting force, the whole show is framed on a small stage upon the larger stage lending it individuality, making it an object of extreme curiosity, like a curio or favored *objet d'art* on a shelf. There is a silent stage manager or Mute (Alix Rikki Ogawa) who brings on the props or helps remove or reset the curtain, and of course, the Narrator or El Gallo who sets the scene and nurtures us to observe the moral at hand.



For those unfamiliar with the basic story, two fathers (Matt Stevens, Michael P. Wallot), who have had a wall separating their properties, pretend to feud in order that their children will rebel and fall in love. They really want the marriage but use reverse psychology to get the children interested in one another. They set up an elaborate abduction, bring in the actor El Gallo, who with the assistance of two other actors (Joey D'Auria, Corky Loupe), seduce the girl Luisa (Audrey Curd) allowing the boy Matt (Matt Franta) to rescue and save her in a duel with the perpetrator El Gallo. After all is made well, the families reunite and the wall is torn down, only to leave the young couple bored, disillusioned and cynical about this happy state of affairs. Both start arguing as their fathers had and split, desiring to seek new and fascinating adventure in the outside world. Of course, as in life, both encounter devastation and turmoil - with the help again of the three actors - and return safely to their happy state, learning to appreciate what they already have, the simple joys of life.



The cast is nothing short of ecstasy. Karbo is strong, dashing and wonderfully egotistical and mischievous as

El Gallo, without the tiniest bit of exaggeration. Curd as Luisa adds sweetness and deliciously calculated flirtation. Luisa is enthusiastic and ripe for romance, and Curd lends her just the right amount of teenage vitality. Franta as Matt is slightly less so but has an innocence in expression and demeanor that makes the arrangement work. Stevens and Wallot are sheer delight as the fathers, relishing their beautifully comedic moments. D'Auria steals his scenes as the Old Actor Henry and Loupe is right behind him, enjoying every grimace and pratfall. Ogawa is lovely to watch as the Mute, as she executes her moves with quiet grace.

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