



Jollyship The Whiz-Bang: Punch and Booty

By Duncan Pflaster · Thursday, June 5, 2008

Pirates, Puppets, Rock Music, Ancient Ruins, Sex, Sea Chanteys, and an effete talking Crab... Add all those together in a blender and you might approximate the magnificent insanity of Jollyship the Whiz-Bang, currently playing at Ars Nova through June 28th.

Jollyship the Whiz-Bang is a volatile cross between puppet theatre and a rock concert: we begin on the eponymous clipper, with the insane Captain Clamp (a puppet voiced by co-creator Nick Jones), who is leading his reluctant crew to the elusive Party Island, for which they've been searching for the last five years. The crew (the band, as well as more puppets) is ready to mutiny, but they don't want to hurt the Captain's feelings... To say any more would be to give away the wonderfully convoluted plot. The show is full of powerful rock music (by co-creator Raja Azar), hilarious one-liners "That big star there, that's the North Star, aint it?" "...No sir, that's the sun", and somehow, through the insanity of its comedy, manages to hit a nerve of truth. As puppets, as with Punch and Judy shows, we applaud the grotesques and forgive their foibles, no matter how bizarre. The show is comic genius, and I laughed heartily throughout.

But be warned- this puppet show is not for children, but rather for the childlike part within we adults that still longs for the glee of a puppet show, for pirates with problems like ours, for an epic adventure that the modern world lacks. As the pirates sing in the show, "Are we not Sons of the Waves"?

The performers are all excruciatingly talented, and everyone looks hot in pirate gear. Jesse Wallace on Drums; Daniel Kutcher on bass and as the voice of



Photo by Carol Rosegg

Dennis the Boatswain; Keith Frederickson as Lead Guitarist Von Heiselstein and others; Nick Jones on lead vocals, rhythm guitar, and the voices of Captain Clamp and Tom the Cabin Boy; cutie Raja Azar as first mate Mr. Skeeve on keyboards; Julie Lake as a bunch of female puppets and seagulls (her rowdy intermission sea chanteys were also delightful); and Steven Boyer stealing the show as The Crab (aka "Jumpin' Jack McGillicuddy the Deck Hand Man").

Sam Gold's direction never lets the action flag, and creates some really remarkable effects.

It's a highly enjoyable evening. Go check it out, if you'd like to laugh till your sides ache.