

Jollyship the Whiz-Bang

Reviewed By: Patrick Lee · Jun 5, 2008 · New York

Puppet troupe, ribald pirate-themed comedy act, kick-ass rock band: the performers known as Jollyship The Whiz Bang are all three, and their seemingly incongruous mix of irreverent comedy and high energy new-wave retro rock make their self-titled new show *Jollyship the Whiz-Bang*, at Ars Nova, an evening of gleefully ridiculous fun. True, the show is as much a concert as it is theater, but it all coheres since both the comedy and the music are delivered with the same often naughty playfulness and infectious energy under Sam Gold's direction. The second act is less successful than the first at integrating the rock songs into the mix, but that doesn't kill the party buzz. The rough edges are part of what make the show exciting and refreshingly slapdash.

The story follows the high seas adventures of Captain Clamp, whose puppet features give him the perpetual gritted-teeth expression of a coke fiend. His raging alcoholism and substance abuse put his shipmates in the mood for mutiny just when his much too-beloved Cabin Boy has gone missing. Thanks partly to a supportive new friendship with a talking crab (who sounds more than a little like Stuey from *The Family Guy*) and to the taunting mockery of a seagull with gaydar, the Captain forsakes his pirate lifestyle and discovers religion.

As befits a show in which a randy closet case pirate can be spiritually advised by a crab, the Captain's religious conversion isn't treated as anything more than yet another way to make silly off-color jokes and to keep the deliriously ridiculous extended



Photo by Carol Rosegg

Nick Jones and company in Jollyship the Whiz-Bang

sketch comedy moving. A good deal of the humor is derived from the show's style of presentation, which often brings to mind children's television, of material that is most definitely not for kids. (Unlike *Avenue Q*, this show even features a moment of graphic (female) puppet nudity.) The humor couldn't be called sophisticated, but it's not stupid either: a couple of the numbers are parodies of drinking songs, such as "Let's All Dress Up In Women's Clothes."

Both voicing the Captain Clamp puppet and fronting the band is the show's co-writer Nick Jones, whose hyper-attuned comic skills and dynamic on-stage personality dominate the show. He's an alert comedian, delivering his scripted lines as if he's making them up on the spot. And he's a sensational and thoroughly confident frontman for the band,