

The Black Rider is a devilishly clever show

THE BLACK RIDER

At the Waterfront Theatre on Granville Island, to Saturday
Tickets \$24/\$18, call 604-257-0366

BY PETER BIRNIE

VANCOUVER SUN

Grotesquerie doesn't get much stranger than *The Black Rider*, a fascinating example of interdisciplinary insanity. Take the seductive songs of Tom Waits and weird words by William S. Burroughs, add the dark theatrics of avant-garde artist Robert Wilson and reduce it all to fit the budget of a small Edmonton theatre troupe, and you have a devilishly clever opening show for the third annual PuSh Festival.

Despite some sound-system glitches on opening night, this musical treat took off and soared. While director Ron Jenkins keeps his cast in the constant motion of Marie Nychka's rigidly stylized choreography, musical director Corinne Kessel leads a remarkable trio in giving the Waits score its full due as a mix of accessible

melody and Kurt Weill-style impressionism.

The whole show blends the benign and bizarre, stitching pretty tunes to dark words in a story thick with evil intent. Our bumbling hero (Kevin Corey) is a pencil-pusher who can't woo his sweetheart (Rachael Johnston) until her huntsman father (George Szilagy) is convinced the kid can hunt, which won't happen until the devil (Michael Scholar Jr.) offers magic bullets.

They'll cost the kid his soul, of course, but a wildly nonlinear storyline never states the obvious. Instead a tangle of tangential bits of business, obfuscating and entertaining all at once, allude to addictions of all kinds. In white-face with yellowed teeth and blood-red lips, the singers are all strong. But the stand-outs are Clinton Carew in a variety of smaller roles (at one point sounding exactly like Waits), Michele Brown as the huntsman's wife and especially Corey, who also does a few bars in the composer's distinct grumble.

Sun Theatre Critic

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