

# Hell of a deal with the devil

Three-way marriage of Waits, Wilson and William S. lives happily ever after

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"Step right up suckers and suckees," as the ringmaster says, near the onset of *The Black Rider*. "Harry's Harbour Bizarre is proud to present, under the Big Top tonight, Human Oddities."

Not that the three-way marriage of Beat seer William S. Burroughs, crud-piped musical bard Tom Waits, and theatre rebel/superstar Robert Wilson is odd. As you'll see from the big, bold, stylish Ron Jenkins production opening the Theatre Network season (then hitting the road), they have a natural affinity for each other.

The Faustian bargain via an old German folk tale is, it turns out, a natural for Burroughs' hallucinogenic preferences in imagery: "That's the way the pan flashes, that's the way the market crashes, that's the way the whip lashes." And the devil's cabaret, as a circus of love and death, is admirably suited to Waits' taste for tuneful old-fashioned ballads that have gone ever-so-slightly rancid: *The*

## REVIEW

### The Black Rider

Theatre: November Theatre  
at Theatre Network

Directed by: Ron Jenkins

Starring: Michael Scholar Jr, Kevin Corey, Clinton Carew, George Szilagyi, Michele Brown, Rachael Johnston

Running: through Oct. 24

Tickets and info: 453-2440

*Briar and the Rose*, for example, where love and morbidity are inseparable. In turn, the kiss-klezmer-goodbye sounds of a quacky, weird onstage band, like the truly original Devil's Rubato Band led by Corinne Kessler from the trombone, could have been borrowed from Weill, Brecht and that gang.

As for Wilson, the purely theatrical nature of the stage pictures that are his natural habitat are perfect for the phantasmagorical landscape of the mind, in which magic bullets, acquired from the

devil, are like drugs. You need more and more.

When you see Jenkins' bold, stylish, proudly low-budget production, with its heightened acting and ingenious markers, you'll wonder why anyone would want to spend a million bucks kitting out a stage. It's part of the fun of the show that the devil, Peg Leg (Michael Scholar Jr.) should open a red door to enter the stage, that he should be conceived as a marionettiste pulling invisible strings on his "clients," or that the stag of the forest should be actors crossing the stage with antlers attached to their arms. The integers of expressionism are all there.

It was Scholar who took the initiative that led to the English language premiere of *The Black Rider* at the 1998 Fringe. By the time Edmonton saw the show, it had premiered in Hamburg, in German, and been translated into seven other languages, none of them English. Jenkins took it in hand and the results, honed still further and somewhat re-cast here, are hugely entertaining.

See RIDER / H2

## Cast is zestful and sharp

### RIDER

Continued from H1

Grinning, white-faced, black-lipped creatures burst onto the stage (designer: Marissa Kochanski), lit like grotesques in a freak show by Michael Kruse.

Lovestruck young Wilhelm, played by Kevin Corey, is a nice guy. But the paper-pusher is shooting blanks, insofar as winning the hand of his true love is concerned. Her father insists that any suitor be a hunter, and Wilhelm couldn't hit a moose with a double-decker. Enter the devil, with his magic silver bullets. Voilà, Wilhelm is unerring. But, as the young man finds out, bar-

gains with the devil are invariably "left-hand deals with a staged deck."

The six-actor cast is zestful, sharp, and sharply choreographed by Marie Nychka, who was in the original production. Clinton Carew, who has stage presence for days, riotously snarls and sneers his way through the show. Scholar, as the suave and sinister Peg Leg, is an elegant creature. Michele Brown as Wilhelm's mom, Rachael Johnston (who has a soprano voice like a scream), and George Szilagyi as the intransigent papa: all are excellent.

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IAN JACKSON, EPIC

A gun-toting Kevin Corey and Clinton Carew hit the bullseye in *The Black Rider*.