



Michael Scholar Jr. performs in *The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets*.

Eccentric oddity, *The Black Rider* sure to wow crowds

BY PETER BIRNIE
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The Arts Club Theatre goes out on a limb at this year's PuSh International Performing Arts Festival. Thankfully, it's a sturdy limb.

The last time *The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets* rode into town, it opened the premiere PuSh Festival in 2005 and wowed the crowds. The Arts Club has brought *The Black Rider* back in a big way, placing it on the

company's Granville Island Stage for a run lasting more than three weeks, and fingers are crossed that audiences will once again flock to this fascinating oddity.

The eccentric trio of musician Tom Waits, writer William Burroughs and theatre maverick Robert Wilson created *The Black Rider* in 1991, in German, for Hamburg's Thalia Theater. True to its surreal source in a triumvirate known for transcendence, this wildly original music-theatre

piece features the growl of Waits' music, the twist of Burroughs' language and the sheer visual brilliance of Wilson's direction.

The Black Rider made its English-language world premiere in Edmonton, where Michael Scholar Jr. produced the play for November Theatre as a Fringe Festival show. In the decade since its debut, this production has toured the continent and garnered both critical praise and enthusiastic audiences.

November's take on the Faustian tale of addiction and loss has the hearty approval of Waits himself, who came away impressed with the way the small troupe had cleverly used minimal resources to blend, as I wrote when I first reviewed *The Black Rider*, "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 (Jon Baggaley) 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 non-linear 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. Get yourself hooked.