

St. John's, NF

Sunday, July 2, 2006

The Telegram

BACKSTAGE

THEATRE

Must see

The second Friday show was November Theatre's *The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets*. If *Fear of Flight* is a must-see production, you cannot even consider missing *The Black Rider*, unless you want to be an outsider for the rest of the festival — and unless you want to miss images, episodes, techniques and music that will remain permanently in your theatrical memory bank.

The Black Rider is an expressionist opera, translated into English from a German original. It is a post-Brechtian, cabaret-style, Gothic story of an inoffensive clerk who enters into a deal with the devil to gain the hand of a

beautiful maiden, whose father is a woodsman who values only marksmanship and killing things. So our clerk trades pen for gun, and soul for the devil's magic bullets.

Now, I do not guarantee you will like it. I was shifting uneasily in my seat for the first 10 or 15 minutes. Thereafter, I was hooked.

So, why should you see this weird folktale operetta? Because you will experience dance, clowning, mime, tumbling and black comic action, accompanied by disabused, sardonic music from an on-stage combo with a wicked trombone, in a highly professional production with a broad palette of styles, techniques, images, colours and effects.

Don't fret the plot. Relax. Watch and listen. Perhaps you will like it, as we did on opening night. But you will not easily forget it.

Directed by Ron Jenkins, *The Black Rider* plays until Tuesday at Memorial University's Reid Theatre, starting at 7 p.m. and running for 90 minutes or so.

Gordon Jones