


I don't get it. Seriously, sometimes a critic has to simply admit that a play has completely flown over his or her head. November Theatre's **The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets** is that play for me. That doesn't mean I didn't enjoy myself; it just means I don't know why. And the more I tried to dissect my thoughts, the more lost in them I became.

A collaborative work between singer-songwriter and sometime philosopher Tom Waits, the late Beat poet William S. Burroughs, and envelope-pushing avant-garde theatre artist Robert Wilson, *The Black Rider* is a loose adaptation of a fable about magical bullets that never miss their mark. Of course, these bullets come with a devil's curse, so that every once in a while they take an unintended and devastating trajectory of their own.

That, my friends, is pretty much where the narrative ends. The rest of the play is made up of elements of classical and folk dance, puppetry, circus arts, clowning, mime, slapstick, cabaret, operetta, and just about every traditional theatrical discipline, underscored by pseudo-klezmer music that, had I not already known, I would have certainly guessed was the work of Tom Waits.

The cast is jaw-droppingly proficient in every respect; I just don't really know what it was that they were actually doing. Special mention must go, however, to Rachael Johnston, who was simply riveting in each and every one of her scenes, and Mackenzie Gray, whose insane-asylum voice and high-octane delivery perfectly mirrored this glorious mess of a musical.

Maybe the curse of being a critic is to search for meaning even if none is intended. If so, I'm glad *The Black Rider* has bested me for now. I urge you to go, if only to tell me what you thought it was all about.

*To Feb. 9 at Granville Island Stage (1585 Johnston), 8 p.m. (Mon-Sat), 7:30 p.m. (Tues). Tickets \$30-\$41 from 604 687-1644. Part of the PuSh Festival.* 

Steven Schelling