

THE BLACK RIDER: THE CASTING OF THE MAGIC BULLETS

By Tom Waits, William S. Burroughs, and Robert Wilson. Directed by Ron Jenkins. A November Theatre production, presented by the Arts Club Theatre Company and the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival. At the Arts Club's Granville Island Stage on Friday, January 18. Continues until February 9

◆ Giving yourself over to *The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets* is like consenting to rough sex. It may bruise you, but you will like it.

Hallucinatory writer William S. Burroughs penned the script, and Tom Waits, that death-voiced poet, wrote the songs. Together with experimental director Robert Wilson, they created *Black Rider*, based on the German folktale "Der Freischütz".

It's a meditation on addiction—most obviously to heroin, but really to any substance or behaviour of your choice.

Because of the quirky rules of his village, a clerk named Wilhelm will

only be allowed to marry his beloved Katchen if he proves himself a good marksman. He's a terrible shot, but Peg Leg (aka Satan) offers him magic ammo: "I have blessed each of these bullets and they shine like a spoon."

The deep sense of incompetence—of worthlessness—that feeds dependency is the dark stream that flows beneath *The Black Rider*. Wilhelm wouldn't need the bullets if he didn't believe he was lacking. And the play's junkie sensibility is defeatist: success in this world is defined by unappealing brutality, the ability to slaughter. Every desire is poisonous: the love between Wilhelm and Katchen is marked by clinging appetite. And the bullets don't really make Wilhelm a good marksman—they just make him feel like one.

Under Ron Jenkins's direction, the artifice of this production, with its whitefaced actors, is extreme—and seductive. Kevin Corey is dazzlingly acrobatic, as well as innocent and sweet-voiced, as Wilhelm. Rachael Johnston (Katchen) is so physically precise and vocally audacious—shrieking, moaning, singing in a pure soprano—it's as if she's etching her performance on steel. And Michael Scholar Jr.'s Peg Leg is as sexy as a jungle cat.

Let them take you.

> COLIN THOMAS