

Cultural Daily

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Kansas City Choir Boy: Love and Inspiration

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, October 21st, 2015

Love lost and inspiration found hover like the angel of death over *Kansas City Choir Boy*, an intricate one-hour operetta with music and lyrics by Todd Almond and starring Almond, Courtney Love and a troupe of sirens and musicians. In less time than it takes most performances to set their wheels in motion, *Kansas City Choir Boy* navigates the entire course of a relationship. It's theatre not to be missed.

The story is simple. A musician (Almond), holed up in a Midwestern motel room, sees a TV news report that Athena, a former lover (Love), was murdered in New York. He spirals to a fantasia of remembrance, playing through their courtship, love-play, and Athena's decision to find her fortune in the big city.

Yet, under Kevin Newbury's careful and sure direction, this simple thread creates a complex web. Almond's songs are musically adventuresome, and his lyrics match them; they are filled with well-worked references and call-backs to fire, stars and light, imagery that is mirrored in Victoria "Vita" Tzykun's LED-rich set design.

Almond is immediately likable and relatable as a performer. He is tall and handsome and unprepossessing, and he moves with unselfconscious ease. Love has never been better. Her rounded, grounded portrayal of Athena is the center of the operetta's wheel. Her husky voice holds melody perfectly, and gives earthy realism to her stately bearing. More than anything else, you sense that Almond and Love are having fun on stage: they enjoy being performers.

Kansas City Choir Boy details its love story in a way that brings to mind the central scene of Godard's *Contempt*, in which Michel Piccoli and Brigitte Bardot enact the beginning, middle and end of their relationship in a single walk through the unfinished doorways of their house, clad in sheets that make them look like Greek gods. "I love you totally, tenderly, tragically," Piccoli says in that film. "When I say I want to fade away, I think you misunderstand," sings Love, over and over, at *Kansas City Choir Boy*'s climax.

Thanks to Beth Morrison and Beth Morrison Projects for producing the show and bringing it on tour. It is hard to produce theatre that strays from the mainstream, but that's the theatre that most needs support and is most rewarding. *Kansas City Choir Boy* is especially rewarding, and this is a show lucky theatre-goers will remember for a long time to come.

Kansas City Choir Boy plays through November 15. Tickets are available online at www.CenterTheatreGroup.org, by calling CTG Audience Services at (213) 628-2772, in person at

the Center Theatre Group box office (at the Ahmanson Theatre at the Music Center in downtown Los Angeles) or at the Kirk Douglas Theatre box office two hours prior to performances. The Kirk Douglas Theatre is located at 9820 Washington Blvd. in Culver City, CA 90232. Ample free parking and restaurants are adjacent.

Top image: Todd Almond and Courtney Love in “Kansas City Choir Boy” at the Center Theatre Group/Kirk Douglas Theatre. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

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