



SOUTHERN OREGON'S NEWS SOURCE

Mail Tribune

Discover Life Daily

December 28, 2011

43°
Forecast / Radar[NEWS](#) [SPORTS](#) [BUSINESS](#) [OPINION](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [TEMPO](#) [PHOTOS/VIDEOS](#) [COMMUNITY](#) [SPECIAL REPORTS](#) [INTERACT](#) [CLASSIFIEDS](#) [MAGAZINES](#)

Review: Camelot's damned elusive hero is hugely entertaining

December 04, 2011

By Bill Varble
for the Mail Tribune

When the second production of "The Scarlet Pimpernel" played in London (the first had flopped, prompting Baroness Emmuska Orczy, the playwright, to revamp the second act), audiences loved it, but the critics excoriated it.

"Old fashioned," they snorted.

That was in 1905. In 1997 the story was made into a Broadway musical with a score by Frank Wildhorn and book by Nan Nighton. It is, naturally, even more old-fashioned now than it was a century ago.

But refracted through the lens of a different age, it's a campy musical melodrama (one envisions the baroness seeing it: who knew?). And Camelot Theatre, under the direction of Livia Genise, has given the old warhorse a muscular new production.

It's the early 1790s, and the French Revolution has turned nasty, with Robespierre (Tom Weiner) riding high and Madame Guillotine thirsty for some one-percenter blood. Aristocrats who haven't managed to flee — and anybody suspected of disloyalty to the new regime — face the terror of a date with the new "national razor."

Beautiful French aristocrat Marguerite St. Just (Kelly Jean Hammond) has married the wealthy English dandy Sir Percy Blakeney (Tim Homsley) and gone to live in England. It's a strangely tentative, unconsummated marriage, as Percy darkly eyes his new wife's history with Chauvelin (Darek Riley), a mysterious Frenchman and revolutionary who works for Robespierre and who will eventually threaten Marguerite with the execution of her brother Armand (Justin Williams).

And Marguerite, in turn, eyes her apparently feckless husband and his foppish friends with growing dismay.

Against this background a hero arises, a gallant Englishman who, in the guise of The Scarlet Pimpernel, a name he takes from the small red flower with which he signs his notes, rescues politically incorrect but otherwise innocent would-be victims of The Terror, which technically historians date from the following year, but heads are rolling, so let's not quibble.

The dashing Pimpernel enlists his friends in a league dedicated to saving the innocent from the guillotine and quickly becomes the talk of England and France, not to mention an iconic model for later superheros devoted to fighting evil-doers with the aid of masks or cover identities (Superman, Batman, the Green Hornet, Zorro, the Lone Ranger, et al).

Among those smitten by the heroics of the Pimpernel is Marguerite, who can't help but contrast his reckless derring-do with the apparently pointless, ostentatious life of her husband, portrayed in a gleefully over-the-top performance by Homsley as a clever man acting the part of a dim-witted poseur.

Percy and his circle of nincompoops dress up in designer Heather St. Louis's amazing costumes (high heels, lace, hankies in their sleeves, etc.) and mince about like a Gallic Monty Python in "Upper-Class British Twits of 1892," a John Waters revue: So when Chauvelin scours the English countryside for that "damned elusive Pimpernel," he needn't bother with that lot, for sure. Right?

With all the talk about the brave deeds of the Pimpernel, we go most of the play without seeing him and his minions in action. Wildhorn and Nighton could have used a sword-fight scene set in France, which might have enlivened a long first act that started to drag a bit before the intermission.

And some of the French accents are un peu faible. But most of the singing is very good, indeed, particularly that of Hammond, an opera singer, and Riley, a Southern Oregon University student who played Pirelli in Camelot's "Sweeney Todd."

Homsley doesn't have the trained vocal chops of those two, but he's a riveting actor (he was a splendid Jack Rover in SOU's "Wild Oats" and appeared in two of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's 2011 offerings, "The Pirates of Penzance" and "Willful") who knows how to sell a song, committing to it fully.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel" is a huge production, more than two-dozen actors playing 30-something roles (many are double-cast), with 25 songs, a live orchestra, a faux proscenium arch with pimpernel icons, lavish costumes, sword fighting and the brilliant sound, lights and projections of Brian O'Connor and Bart Grady.

All the silliness aside, there are themes here of love, trust and paranoia. There are apparently political resonances, too. The baroness's sympathies lie flat-out with the one percent. On the other hand, as Presila Quinby suggests in notes to the play, the French government had served the rich, letting poverty fester while digging deep to pay for foreign wars, nudge-nudge. There's also the theme of eliminating dissent, something about the 1950s, the McCarthy hearings.

Whether you see that or not, you don't see drama, even musical melodrama, on a scale this grand much anymore.

POPULAR TODAY

- Hunt for Hungry Hill - 12/28/2011
- Long recovery continues for woman injured at L.A. airport - 12/28/2011
- EMERGENCY SERVICES - 12/28/2011
- Police believe another rooftop burglar is preying on Medford businesses - 12/28/2011

Text Size: [A](#) | [A](#) | [A](#)[Print this Article](#) [Email this Article](#)[ShareThis](#)Like MailTribune.com? **SUBSCRIBE** 

Set your thermostat between 50° and 60° when you're away.

Lime light DEALS

Current Price: ~~\$0~~80% off
Home TECH
Total IT
Solutions**BUY NOW!**Deal Expires: 4d:12h:30m
[View More Deals](#)

\$9 Complete In-Home Computer Diagnosis

34 COUPONS ONLINE TODAY

[MORE >>](#)BUY ONE GET ONE!
Round Table PizzaREDUCED! 50 inch TV for \$569?!?!
Larson's Home FurnishingsFREE SONICARE! For New Patients
Modern Dental Care PCFREE TEMPUR-PEDIC BEAR
Mattress Gallery by La-Z-Boy10% Off Local Farm Fresh Buffalo Meat
Southern Oregon Fine Meats10% Off Spartan Merchandise
Southern Oregon SpartansFREE Two-Page Spread for Your 2011 Year
In ReviewSUBSCRIBE TO THE
Mail Tribune
CLICK HERE TO GET 2 WEEKS FREE

TOP JOBS

Preschool Teachers OREGON CHILD
Classifieds

City of Medford EOE/ADA. For list

"The Scarlet Pimpernel" is hugely entertaining. It wouldn't have been possible in the old Camelot, and it shows off the capabilities of the new James Morrison Collier Theater. It runs a bit under three hours and plays through New Year's Eve at Camelot.

Bill Varble writes about arts and entertainment for the Mail Tribune. He can be reached at varble.bill@gmail.com.

[HOME](#)

Ads by Google

[Goldstar® - Go Out More](#)
50% Off Tickets to Musicals, Comedy, Sports & More. Join Now!
www.goldstar.com

[Loneliest Road in America](#)
Learn about the Loneliest Road and historic Highway 50 in Nevada
PonyExpressNevada.com

[Accurate Credit](#)
Get Reliable Credit Information on Your Customers Now - Only D&B.
www.dnb.com/dnbi



AdChoices

Print this Article Email this Article
 ShareThis

MEDFORD, or Classifieds

Drivers: New Years Resolution: NEW
MEDFORD, or Classifieds

PHARMACISTS RITE AID now has
MEDFORD, or Classifieds

[More jobs](#)



TOP HOMES

\$309,900



Medford, Oregon
Whittle Home Sales
[More Details...](#)

\$149,900



Rogue River, Oregon
Whittle Home Sales
[More Details...](#)

\$359,900



Jacksonville, Oregon
Whittle Home Sales
[More Details...](#)

[More Top Homes](#)

