

[Sections](#)

Los Angeles Times

[LOG IN](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS



Review: Carousing away with 'Villon' at Odyssey Theatre



Poet Francois Villon (Kevin Weisman, left) recites his "Ballad of Hanged Men" to his outlaw comrades (Peggy Ann Blow, Geoffrey Dwyer, Alana Dietze). (Miki Turner)

By PHILIP BRANDES

FEB. 20, 2014 | 6 PM

He may have been the superstar poet of 15th century France, but François Villon was also a drunken brawler, a bandit and a murderer — in short, a complicated guy who embodied the conflicted paths of art, morality and class warfare explored in the

Padua Playwrights production of Murray Mednick's new play, "Villon," at the Odyssey Theatre.

Though shaped by the few known biographical details of Villon's sensational career as a scholar-turned-outlaw, don't expect a swashbuckling thrill ride. It's a Mednick play. Admirers of his uncompromising style will appreciate this densely cerebral deconstruction of events, related largely through direct address to the audience rather than traditional theatrical presentation.

Portrayed with gleeful lack of repentance by charismatic Kevin Weisman, the rough-hewn, bad-boy Villon cycles through his rescue from an impoverished, abusive household, his abandoned academic career and his frequent run-ins with the law while leading a band of robbers.

PHOTOS: Faces to watch 2014 | Theater

That he also invented revolutionary forms of poetry is treated as a given — the inseparability of greatness from the gutter is the recurring focus as Villon examines his life with equally unsparing contempt for posterity and for himself.

Villon and his accomplices sometimes traveled in the guise of troubadours. This lends meta-theatrical layering as he enlists them in fragmentary re-enactments, frequently revising "truth" to suit narrative convenience and breaking up extensive exposition with incongruous flashes of vaudevillian shtick. Among the ragtag ensemble, Peggy Ann Blow supplies the most vivid and nuanced character as Villon's fearless hunchbacked partner and confidante.

Mednick ties the piece together with a hauntingly poetic meditation on the nature of evil and self-awareness, but he makes you work for it — unprepared viewers may find this a challenging intellectual slog.

"Villon." Odyssey Theatre, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles. 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends March 23. \$30. (310) 477-2055, Ext. 2, or www.paduaplaywrights.org. Running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS