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LA CAGE AUX FOLLES

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WOW!

Jerry Herman and Harvey Fierstein's *La Cage Aux Folles* is back in L.A. thanks to East West Players, and as anyone who's seen one of EWP's annual Broadway musical revivals will tell you, this means yet another thrillingly reimagined Asian take on a contemporary musical theater classic.



Director Tim Dang takes the 1983 smash and its longtime gay couple Georges (Jon Jon Briones) and Albin (Gedde Watanabe) and transforms Georges's drag club and its glamorous star Zaza (the outrageously flamboyant Albin in sequins, feathers, and a whole lot of mascara) into a Thailand-style nightclub whose "ladyboys" could fool all but the most eagle-eyed ogler.

La Cage Aux Folles sets its plot wheels a-turnin' when Georges's adult son (the result of his father's one-and-only heterosexual one-night fling) announces to Papa his impending nuptials to the daughter of a right-wing, anti-gay politician.



Since 2007, Steven Stanley's StageSceneLA.com has spotlighted the best in Southern California theater via reviews, interviews, and its annual StageSceneLA Scenies.

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Not only that but young Jean-Michel is insistent that his surrogate mom Albin *not* be present when Anne and her parents come to meet their daughter's fiancé's family.

Not surprisingly, this causes considerable ruffling of Zaza's feathered boas.



With one catchy Herman show tune after another and a hilarious book by gay icon Fierstein, La Cage Aux Folles's message of love and acceptance is every bit as relevant in 2016 than as when it debuted in New York over thirty years ago.

Topping the list of reasons East West Players' La Cage should top any Broadway-lover's must-see list this month and next are its two stars, Sixteen Candles' iconic Long Duk Dong and his West End-sensation costar.



To the list of Albin greats (including Tony winners George Hearn and Douglas Hodge) can now be added the name Gedde Watanabe, the East West Players favorite proving fierce and fiery and utterly fabulous in the performance of his career, whether throwing a tantrum, attempting in vain to imitate John Wayne, raging against an ungrateful son, or bringing down the house with the Act One closer "I Am What I Am."

As Watanabe's partner in same-sex love and commitment, Briones brings Georges to life with just the right combination of charm and flair and charisma, and sings with the best of



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them, including serenading Albin with “Song On The Sand” and duetting “With You On My Arm” with the love of his life.

Allen Lucky Weaver takes Jacob, Georges and Albin’s butler-turned-maid, and turns him into a scene-stealing Tagalog-accented *diva divina*, and that’s not even taking into consideration the deliciously outlandish costumes Anthony Tran has designed for the Cagelle-wannabe.

Jinwoo Jung and Audrey Cain dance gracefully *and* look pretty as a picture as Georges and Albin’s rather prickish son and his girl-next-door fiancée Anne, and Jung shows off a lovely tenor in “With Anne On My Arm.”

Michael Hagiwara and Sharline Liu are absolute delights as the sexually repressive Monsieur Dindon and his sexually repressed wife, the talented EWP regulars doubling equally amusingly in a couple of uncredited cameos.

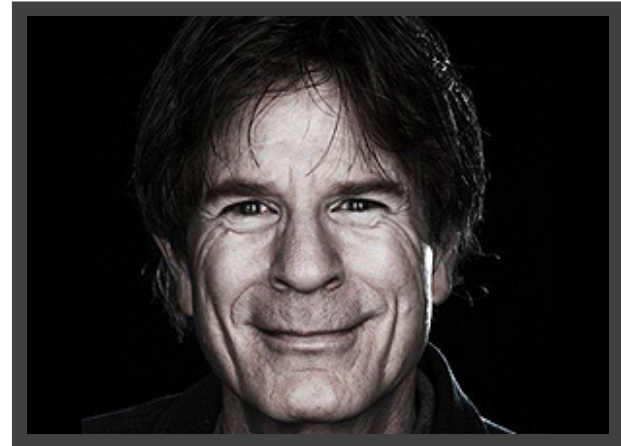


Grace Yoo takes the throwaway role of *restaurateuse* Jacqueline and makes her a divalicious scene-stealer ever awaiting her TMZ closeup.



As for the muscular bikini-clad Cesar Cipriano and Reuben Uy, not only do the hunky duo provide tasty beefcake in a preshow

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As editor of StageSceneLA.com, Steven Stanley is one of Los Angeles' most prolific theater reviewers. He is also the author of *Moroccan Roll*, and an ESL instructor in the English Language Program at California State University, Los Angeles since 1979. [\(read more\)](#)

photo credit: Eric Schwabel

bonus opposite Weaver's Jacob, they play near-naked Greek "leapfrog" in addition to some terrific fully-clothed supporting cameos.

Finally, it wouldn't be La Cage Aux Folles without Les Cagelles—Christopher Aguilar as Phaedra, aka "The Enigma"; Carlos Chang as Hanna ("Women call her devil, police call her daily"); Jonathan Kim as Bitelle, packing abundant punch into her petite frame; DT Matias as "triller from Manila" Chantal; and Alex Sanchez as Mercedes, every bit as eye-catching as a Benz—a quintet of drop-dead gorgeous stunners who could give bona fide Bangkok showgirls a run for their money.



Choreographer Reggie Lee dazzles throughout the night with ballroom and balletic moves, chorus line oomph, and more.

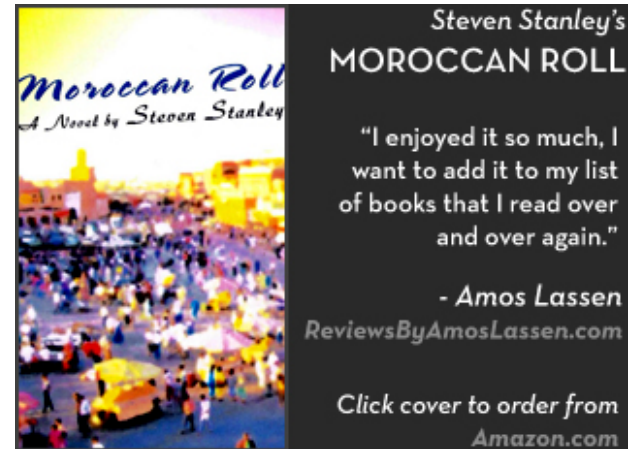
Marc Macalintal scores once again with his impeccable musical direction and by conducting the production's pizzazzy six-piece band.

A crackerjack East West Players design team spices things up Far East-style, beginning with Victoria Petrovich's glitzy set (the dragon motif curtain is a nifty touch, though I didn't really get the giant sugar cubes standing in for furniture), and note should be taken of Dang's inspired use of skimpily-clad hunks as scenery-maneuvering "slave labor" and glittery Cagelles as luscious live statuary.

Tran's costumes earn the production's highest design marks, from Les Cagelles' sequins, feathers, and some skintight leotards (revealing nothing but expert tucking), to Zaza's fabulous gowns, each more gorgeous than the next, to the Dindons' more conservative wear.

Karyn D. Lawrence's flashy lighting, Cricket S. Myers' expert sound design, and Ken Takemoto's multitude of props are all topnotch.

Ondina V. Dominguez is stage manager.





La Cage Aux Folles marks the final production of Tim Dang's nearly three-decade-long artistic directorship of East West Players, and what a way to say goodbye to Tim. To put it succinctly, Dang goes out with a Bang!



East West Players, David Henry Hwang Theatre, 120 Judge John Aiso St., Los Angeles.
www.eastwestplayers.org

—Steven Stanley

May 18, 2016

Photos: Michael Lamont

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