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'The Fantasticks' ' just that - fantastic - at Scottsdale Desert Stages

by **Michelle Hoffman** - Aug. 24, 2009 04:31 PM
 Special for the Republic

After an annoying 10-week run of "Wait Until Dark," Scottsdale Desert Stages [Theatre](#) was on double-secret probation.

'The Fantasticks'

When: 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays through Oct. 11.

Where: [Scottsdale](#) Desert Stages Theatre (Actor's Café), 4720 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale.

Admission: \$22 advance, \$25 day of show, \$20 seniors, \$15 student rush.

Details: 480-483-1664, [desertstages.com](#).

Not anymore. It made parole with the musical [comedy](#) "The Fantasticks," which runs through Oct. 11.

Here's a freebie to a Trivial Pursuit question: "The Fantasticks" set a world record for the longest-running production in a single theater.

After it debuted off-Broadway in 1960 at the Sullivan Street Playhouse, the production ran for 17,163 performances over 42 years. If you lived in the Tri-State area and didn't see it, you might as well have worn your pants backward, you were so un-hip.

An allegory, "The Fantasticks" is whimsically simplistic in its telling, but it tills a deeper, darker meaning under its droll surface.

Boy meets girl. Boy and girl fall for each other. Boy's and girl's parents forbid it. Boy and girl fall harder. It's the yin and yang of [young love](#) and bad poetry.

But the draw of the story isn't romantic rebellion. It's the loss of innocence that takes place afterward. And that's not always such a bad thing when you realize the road to maturity is akin to a sunset, an extraordinary reflection created from waning sunlight and pollutants in the atmosphere.

The gravitas of the play is best summed up by El Gallo's parting line: "We all must die a bit before we grow again."

"X" factor

If the world were forced to divide into two camps, there surely would be an "I Love 'The Fantasticks' " side and an "I Hate 'The Fantasticks' " side.

Historically, critics and theatergoers alike have been split on this one. We're pitching a tent in the former. The story is ageless, and director KatiBelle Collins' tight direction makes this production a pleasure to watch.

Musical note

After 50 years, the haunting, chart-topping ballad "Try to Remember" takes on a reflective resonance (we dig the Roy Oribson version).

Hearing Mark Hackman's (El Gallo) sonorous baritone taps into [childhood memories](#) of white gloves at Mass and riding horses through green-gold alfalfa fields.

Key players

The ace cast gives this vintage production a blast of propane.

Nathan Dunn (Matt) and the vocally stellar Desiree Vaughan (Luisa) are so animatedly fresh you can almost smell the soap.

Newcomers Randy Hesson (Henry) and John Dixon (Mortimer) nearly steal the show. Dixon gives his Mortimer a [Keith Moon](#) twist, much the way Johnny Depp channels Keith Richards in the pirate movies.

Set piece

The colorful, yet sparse, set is faithful to the original concept. Less is more here.

- **Michelle Hoffman**

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