

Thursday, June 25, 2009

[Review- The Roses on the Rocks \(Manhattan Theatre Source\)](#)

The Fab Marquee review by *Karen Tortora-Lee*.

Bill is a bad, bad man.

Thankfully, at the onset of *The Roses on the Rocks* (written by Ellen Boscov and Directed by Richard Caliban) he's already dead (Bill's ghost played by Scott Sowers). Unfortunately, that state of being doesn't keep him from reuniting with Blossom (Laura Montes) almost before his grave has settled; in fact he goes to visit his teen paramour while his wife Peggy (Rachel Jones) is still sorting out casseroles left by neighbors in the wake of his...wake.

According to some, Bill was a good man. According to his wife Peggy, he was a steadfast man whose good heart compelled him to reach out to the community and save girls from a life of unrest. He helped people. He was an angel, a healer, a savior. According to his teen lover, Blossom, he was all these things too. Goodness knows, he had the means to take her little nine year old self and plunk down 15 grand for her little body and take her home and fast forward her into adulthood. You see, where Peggy saw "healer", Blossom saw "pimp" and yet both could distill that to "Savior".



Rachel Jones (Peggy) & Scott Sowers (Bill)
photo credit: Zack Brown

When we meet 14 year old Blossom she is literally prostrate with grief over the death of her beloved Bill, but when he comes back as a spirit to reunite with her it's not so much to make her life better (truly, had he EVER made her life better?) but rather it's to manipulate her into

taking part in a disturbing game at the expense of his grieving widow. It's hard to say what kind of man Bill really was during his life (how far did he push the "good" while behind the mask he was Devilish, replete with horns?), but there's no doubt about it that in death Bill is an abusive man. He lords over Blossom the way so many domineering men do, and from the same place of insecurity. He forces Blossom to not only confront his meek, slightly crazy, tragically empty widow Peggy but to spill the whole story of their sordid love affair as he sits in between them over tea. He even goes so far as to audaciously feel her up as his wife (who can't see him) fusses about setting up the cups and doling out the sugar. Blossom says nary a word that isn't suggested by Bill, she is the puppet to his puppeteer, she even hands over her knife because he tells her to.

Strangely, Bill's intention is to exploit his widow's loneliness, and pick away at a 15 year heartbreak she's been nursing since the loss of her only child...a baby girl she had named Blossom who had died on the day she was born; an event which sent Peggy spiraling into a fantasy world where everything could be solved with a few polite gestures, some nice words, and a lot of money. For Peggy, you see, has **a lot** of money. Enough money to have spent 15 thousand dollars to have a replica made of her baby, a doll she calls First Bloom. Enough money to have Bill take the same amount...another 15 thousand, and buy the little no-named Mexican girl and call her Blossom. It's all very creepy. As it is meant to be.

Soon enough these two disparate ends of Bill's life bind together as these women find that they have more in common than just loving Bill. In fact, as time goes on, each woman sees how Bill was manipulating them and their affection for each other (in a mother/daughter capacity) grows as their disgust with Bill deepens. Similarly the parallel development is that while Bill treated Blossom like a woman he dominated her like a child, whereas Peggy treats her as an age-appropriate child, but encourages her to start on a path of strong womanhood. Peggy decides to re-route Bill's intentions and adopt Blossom; take care of her and give her back the life she was meant to have.

The theme of the doll as symbol of lost innocence is repeated throughout the play effectively as Peggy, in an attempt to bond with the Mexican roots of her daughter-to-be, researched the tradition of the quinceañera and prepares one for Blossom. And so, First Bloom takes on a much more heady role as not just the effigy of the dead

child, but also becomes at times each woman's lost innocence as well as a way to thread in the flashbacks of happier times for Blossom.

Beautifully done are the moments when Blossom reverts back to a more innocent time in her life; only five years earlier for her but what might as well have been a world away; a time when she is still in the loving warmth of her mother's home, watching her own cousin dance at **her** quinceañera and longing for the day she will do the same. Blossom has a history that is charming, simple, and all the more tragic as it snaps back to the present where she is now a 14 year old prostitute taken from her home but worse: parted from her innocence. During these flashbacks Blossom's (now deceased) Mama (Fulvia Vergel) is alternately nurturing, embracing and warm, yet also haunting and tragically sad. Together, all these woman try to piece together their broken history in order to forge a new, clear life together.

Throughout the play the musicians, Helena Espvall and Alberto Villa-Lobos do an amazing job playing music that complements the story and helps to transition the past to the present and back again. The music is all their own original compositions (along with Rana Santacruz) and has a duality of both sadness as well as victory. The lullabies sung by the women of the cast are haunting and lovely while the stuttering terror of each note is palpable when it needs to be.

Every one of the four cast members was outstanding; Scott Sower's Bill was so creepy and eerie at times that you actually did feel as if he were the devil reincarnate; Fulvia Vergel as Mama was like a bolt of happiness that wretched at your heart every time she had to leave again, Rachel Jones plays Peggy with just the right balance of instability (she may come off as a bit nutty and a touch unbalanced but she never lets loose and goes full blown maniacal), and Laura Montes is absolutely astonishing - a completely natural talent and absolutely compelling to watch. Her ability to take Blossom from innocent 9 year old to wicked, love sick 14 year old and all the strange places in between was truly staggering.


Like Blossom's innocence, *The Roses on The Rocks* isn't around for much longer - I urge you to see it while you still can.

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TheRosesontheRocks

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