

Mp3 Fellowship - "fellowship!" The Musical Parody Of The Fellowship Of The Ring

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"Fellowship" The Musical is the hilarious, Broadway style musical parody of "The Fellowship of the Ring." 16 MP3 Songs SPOKEN WORD: Comedy, KIDS/FAMILY: General Children's Music Details: FOR THE LOVE OF THE RINGS Reviewed By Antony Teofilo An interview with the cast and crew of "FELLOWSHIP!" THE MUSICAL I was skeptical as I walked by the El Portal Theater a few blocks from my tiny little apartment in North Hollywood. A poster heralded the arrival of FELLOWSHIP! THE MUSICAL. Even though I knew I'd end up going, I thought, 'We had Tolkien's books. Then the garish '70's cartoons. Then Peter Jackson's movie opus unlike any other. Now a musical based on the THE LORD OF THE RINGS? Sheesh. Don't some people know to leave well enough alone?' Turns out that's exactly what inspired co-creators Joel McCrary and Kelly Holden to come up with the idea in the first place. McCrary, a mountain of a guy whose credits include AMERICAN BEAUTY, MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE, and SEINFELD, went to the dog park with Holden last December and that's where the idea was born. "We were talking about things that should never be turned into musicals. We talked about THE MATRIX, and how that shouldn't be turned into a musical, but it probably will, and THE LORD OF THE RINGS came up. We laughed out loud and said we should do that. In January of last year, we started writing. One of the original ideas was to condense all three movies into one show, but we watched the DVD of the first movie and decided there was just too much to work with there, so we stuck with the first one." Beginning in McCrary's home, and then moving to composer and improv musician Allen Simpson's house, the writers began gathering actors that they thought could play the roles. Song styles were picked for various duets and solos (everything from cheesy '80's rock to sleazy cabaret) and then it was pretty much up to the actors to improvise lyrics for themselves. The whole process took about a year. One might think it difficult to use improvisation to create solid songs and a solid script. Says Simpson, "I can't imagine writing a show like this without improv... putting something together and then just throwing it out there wouldn't work. Getting the actors together and having them bring their words, that's the only way for me to work right now. The bits just created themselves, and we were just there listening." McCrary

financed FELLOWSHIP! himself, out of pocket. A minimalist production that was intended to have few props or expenses gave way to a black-box show of perfectly medium scale. Not that it couldn't play much bigger. I could see this as a larger scale proscenium production. In its current incarnation, though, the cobbled-together feel adds to the fun, as if the actors have pulled some of their wigs and props from a big costume box behind the black curtain. Yet there's definitely care that has gone into each character's garb, so that the show doesn't look amateurish, either. See Legolas's thigh-high, lace-up, suede-looking' brown Converse Chuck Taylorsthey're hilarious and a little, well, geek-sexy at the same time. Necessity is obviously the caring mother of invention in this tightly knit troupe, and there is never any doubt as to which character you're looking at. And the hobbit feet. Don't get me started. You gotta see this thing. Like English holiday pantomimes which give no thought to gender-opposed casting (see the above mentioned Legolas, played by Edi Patterson. If thinking a hot chick playing a male elf is wrong, I don't want to be rightyowza) the show mixes many different styles, from improv to movies to parody and beyond. Each actor had a great deal of input into their character's personality. Matt Young's Aragorn plays a rock guitar solo as he croons to his lady love Arwen, also played by Patterson. "If you read the books, Strider's sort of the rock star of the group. I wanted to make him sort of a rocker / metal dude. We're such big fans of the material. We're all big nerds, too." And yes, they do sing part of their lovers' duet in elvish. I know, I know. Strider + rock guitar = no way am I gonna go see that tripe. Trust me, the formula works by amplifying characters the world is now so familiar with, it's impossible not to laugh at them. I could write a page on each character; suffice it to say there's not a weak link in the chain, and each performance is nuanced, funny, affectionate, and respectful, if just a little irreverent. Okay, a lot irreverent. But never mean-spirited. Certain relationships and realities inside the movies are taken to a whole new level. I mean, Gandalf and Bilbo smoke pipe weed in the flicks. How do you not bring that up? The show is full of great character interactions, too. Most hilarious among them happens with Sam and Frodo, and the love between them that dare not speak its name. "If you start watching the movies," said McCrary, "there are too many meaningful looks. And then, having watched the last one where they're wrestling in the bedit was an obvious choice that worked." It's not overdone though. Initially, both Sam and Frodo were intended to be fruitier than holiday cake. The key to the humor in the relationship is that it's all a bit one-sided. Cory Rouse, who plays Frodo, talks about why they went that way. "In the original script, both Sam and Frodo were very flitty and flighty. But as we worked with it, we realized that Frodo is more the

straight man, so to speak. Sam having that longing for Frodo, and Frodo being his friend, it just adds the right sort of tension to their relationship." McCrary is close to breaking even on the show after a very successful six-week run, and the actors are loathe to give up the characters they have created. Cory Rouse, who fills Frodo's feet says, "It's the best theatrical experience I've ever had, no doubt. At first, we were just sort of like, 'Sure, Joel. We'll help you out with your show.' Now, we're like, 'Thank you for letting me be a part of this! Please don't ever take me away from it!' So, how can you see it? Well, you can't. Not unless you want to show up at the El Portal theater in North Hollywood and hope someone with tickets doesn't arrive. You might be able beg, borrow, or steal your way in (one pair of hipsters sat on the floor in front of the seats for the entire time, no cushions, nothing). Be creative. It's worth it. Oh, and if you DO get tickets, make sure you're on time. There is NO late seating. UPDATE: Hope remains, though. McCrary and company are looking for a new theater to house their hilarious creation in early 2006. Any place that refuses would be foolish. There's no way this show isn't going to make money and bring in huge crowds. They also want to bring the show to a Con near you anywhere in the States (starting with San Diego's Comic-Con last summer) so start harping on those events co-ordinators and promoters. This material is primed, ideal, and ready for the Convention crowd. Where does Joel McCrary see the show heading in the future? Could we see Gollum added? Could we see sequels? "There has been some talk. It would be great to see Gollum do the duet with himself, wouldn't it? We've talked about doing them in repertory where you do the first one on the first night, the second on the second night, and the third on the third night. But we'll have to see. I'm trying to take it one step at a time while looking ahead. We're looking at doing a six-week extension. Heading to off-Broadway would be great. And I worked in Orlando for years, so having other productions going simultaneously is a possibility, too. It feels like word of mouth has really just started to go." Unlike many parodies that choose to use pop song melodies for their song structures, all original songs and music show up here. This is the show for over-the-top fans, fans of the books, fans of the movies, fans of improv, fans of musicals. Even just the curious have plenty of material to keep them from ever feeling alienated. What you get is 100 minutes of stitch-your-sides, tears-in-your-eyes, laugh out loud hilarity that is pulled off with the perfect mix of parody and reverence for Tolkien's tomes. It's a rare concoction. And it's all done for the love of the The Rings.

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