



Men of Steel

Reviewed for TheaterOnline.com By: Virginia Glynn

Even if you were never a comic book collector, you will get an enormous escapist kick out of the Vampire Cowboys action packed production of Men of Steel. Drawn from the comic universe of Captain Justice, the characters are embodied by a talented, rough and tumble cast that just loves a good fight.

The play opens with a prologue in which Liberty Lady (Melissa Paladino) captures and arrests Captain Justice (Jason Liebman) for murder! HUH! What could have happened to our Hero? Enter Maelstrom a/k/a Malcolm (portrayed with force and fire by Tamar Underwood); he narrates, instigates and participates in the interwoven "chapters" that take us back in our story.

In one chapter, Helen Harper (deliciously vamped by Sharon Eisman who's mere turn of head is a stitch), the wife of Jason Price a/k/a Captain Justice is threatened by thugs. She realizes if Cap's secret identity is known, he is vulnerable through her. Mistakenly, she turns to Maelstrom for help. In another chapter, super villain The Mole (played by Paco Tolson with the energy of a popup punching bag) is able to flatten the superheroes with his earthquake-inator. While the Heroes have dual identities, the performers also morph into multiple parts. Tom Myers who renders three very different characters (thug Hurt, Anderson, and Bryant) is bitterly funniest as Bryant, the boy who can't be hurt. His clients line up to pound on him. In another scene, Bryant's father, "Daddy" (Noshir Dalal who makes you watch him in the four characters he portrays) regularly beats "Mommy" (Melissa Paladino remarkably reincarnated as victim). Jeremy Sarver as The Hooded Menace, once boy bully Andy, now arch-villain, enjoys his arsenal of nuclear missiles aimed at major cities, not to mention his Norwegian Ninjas. Losing sight of redeeming values, the bad guys seem to have all the fun.

In the second act superheroes, super villains and victims are incarcerated in the Steel City Penitentiary when Malcolm a/k/a Maelstrom poses as a new corrections officer to rehabilitate and rescue the weakened Captain Justice. In Steel City, however, Maelstrom reveals his own crimes. In war, he says, we sometimes have to do questionable things. There is a final fight scene, a veritable maelstrom, if you will, and it is truly splendid. (No need for strobe lights here). In its wake, however, the lines defining heroes and villains have blurred.

Men of Steel is an ambitious production of a seemingly unwieldy play that has benefited from the immensely firm hand of director Robert Ross Parker and an inspired amount of enthusiasm and joy.