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Duke Kahanamoka vs. the Surfnappers

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Overmeyer, Eric. *Duke Kahanamoka vs. the Surfnappers*. 1993.

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A statue of the legendary Hawaiian hero Duke Kahanamoku comes to life and relates his story in contemporary terms to a couple of Hawaiian children. The Duke was credited with restoring surfing and its spiritual virtues to the islands after the activity was discouraged by early missionaries. Duke Kahanamoku was an Olympic gold medalist in swimming and was later appointed Sheriff of Honolulu. After narrating his background at length, the Duke recounts an adventure in which he thwarted a pair of bad guys from stealing the surf from his islands.

The central character, who lived around the turn of the last century, is given a modern makeover, as are all of the other personages in the story. The hip language and trendy costumes ground the historical/mythical character in a teen pop culture setting. The story unfolds in the style of a Saturday morning cartoon, with one-dimensional characters and a simple, predictable plot.

This play seems to have been created under the assumption that young audiences can only relate to a story if it is told in a language and style which are already familiar to them. While that basic premise has merit, this play was constructed with a narrow view of what children will find familiar and with what elements they can identify. The style and story are more conducive to animation than to stage production and rather than offering audiences a performance which is uniquely theatrical, it reiterates the kind of entertainment which they experience abundantly on television.

This play is found in:

Jennings, Coleman A. *Eight Plays for Children: The New Generation Play Project*. University of Texas Press, 1999. ISBN 0-292-74056-5 cloth, 0-292-74057-3 paperback. \$44.95 cloth, \$19.95 paperback. 479 pp.

A Reviewed by John D. Newman