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Just So stories

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Harris, Aurand. *Just So Stories*. Ankorage Press Inc., 1971. \$25.00 per performance. 37 pp.

Reviewer: Mindy Nelsen

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Folklore; Plays; Fairy Tales; Musicals;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Learning--Juvenile drama; Hard work--Juvenile drama;

Theme: We can learn new things everyday and discoveries come from the imagination.

Production Requirements: Simplistic set, blocks only, few props. Costuming can be more expressive and elaborate or simplistic and suggestive.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 20-25 minutes

Characters: 14, 5 of which can be double cast.

Cast: 5 M / 3 F, rest are interchangeable

Time Period: "When the world was so new and all."

This play is a dramatization of three tales from Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. It follows the basic story line from the aforementioned book with a "spirit of magic" Djinn that introduces the story and moves the plot along. We follow Man from his first discoveries on the earth learning to have a family with Wife and Daughter, to work the land, to tame animals (Dog, Horse, Camel, Cat, etc.) and to communicate (Stranger, Cavewoman, and Chief). The play consists of inter-connected stories wherein we learn why the cat acts the way he does, how the camel got its hump and how the first letter was written.

This is a very inventive play. The characters are simplistic, yet dimensional as they discover the new world around them. The play follows the lives of the first man, woman, child, society and animals at the beginning of the world. They are innocent and therefore simplistic, but as their knowledge and understanding grow, so do the dimensions of their perspective characters. They are witty and relate well to a young audience. The character of the Djinn lets us know that this play is really a story, and the audience is encouraged to think and to see the discoveries they can make in their own world. Harris moves the play along nicely, explaining elements and reasoning that may not first be understood. The dialogue is well connected with the exception of a few brief musical numbers that are intended to add spectacle to the plot, but seem disjointed if not done well. The lyrics are provided, but the music is up to the director. That said, the play seems to move along well, including the audience directly and making them a part of the magic. A major benefit of the play is the simplicity of the production and its ability to relate these situations to each of us. It claims to be full of magic and lives up to its promise.