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Play Reviews

Children's Book Review

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Coralene, Diana-Discipline, and Egbert Sharke are criminals who devise a scheme to buy a broken down summer camp deep in the Minnesota woods. Using the reputation of old Camp Nish Na Bosh Na, the Sharkes manage to attract a number of rich kids. However, they have given faulty directions in their brochure, so no one knows (after they pick up the kids up at the bus station) where the camp is located. The Sharkes are no sweethearts and treat the children terribly. The plan is to extract as much money from the parents as possible and then move up into Canada through the back woods and hold the kids for ransom. The heroine and hero of the story are Laura and Harry Lewis, niece and nephew to the former owner of the long-defunct Camp Nish Na Bosh Na. They are also sent unknowingly (they have never met their aunt) to become Sharke bait. Laura and Harry are, however, resourceful enough to plan a successful escape.

Zaring, noted for her novel, *The Return of the Dragon*, has done a good though not outstanding job on this book. It's hard to believe that all those well-to-do parents would ship their offspring off to camp without checking on things more closely, in spite of the old camp's excellent reputation. The characters are reasonably well developed and may well be the strongest feature of the novel yet for such truly despicable characters, the Sharkes escape punishment for their misdeeds, a disappointment most young readers will share with me. Zaring writes smoothly, and the plot moves quickly to maintain reader involvement.—M.T.

**Plays**

Barrie, J.M. *Peter Pan*. Samuel French, Inc., 1956. $3.00 per copy. Royalty: $35.00—first performance. $25.00 each additional. 95p.

*Peter Pan* is joy, magic, a celebration of youth!

This classic fantasy in five acts traces the adventures of Wendy, John, and Michael Darling, who wake up one night to find the irresistible Peter Pan, leader of the Lost Boys, flitting about their nursery room in search of his shadow.

Peter teaches the children to fly and invites them to Never Land — that whimsical wonderland where children never grow
old. Wendy agrees to be Mother of the Lost Boys and flies away with Peter and her two brothers to the Never-never Land dream island found "second to the right and then straight on 'til morning."

They live an adventurous life amongst mermaids, Indians, fairies, and pirates. The black-hearted captain of the pirate crew, Jsm Hook, is Peter's mortal enemy, but the lad manages to outsmart the nefarious seaman time and time again. Finally, Wendy and her brothers return to Mother and Father Darling, who promise to adopt the Lost Boys. Peter remains behind, however, choosing to stay young forever in his Never Land.

Extensive and creative sets are necessary to properly portray shifts from the Darling home (set in turn of the century England) to Peter's make-believe island world (complete with a mermaid lagoon, a pirate ship, and an underground home in the forest). Lengthy descriptions and stage directions, though irrelevant to the stage production, provide unique insight into Barrie's characters and produce a whimsical text as enjoyable to the reader as the dialogue is to the theatre patron.--L.K.


A melodramatic parody of Dickens' classic story, A Christmas Carol, the play begins in the Olde Curiosity Saloon with Ebeneezer Humbug, the miser, spreading greediness. After many twists and turns in the plot, Humbug is foiled and Bob Scratchit—the clerk, and Felicity Fuzziwig—the orphan, live happily ever after.

This is a funny script with familiar lines not only from Dickens, but Shakespeare as well. The authors have cleverly utilized the technique of playing on words.

Junior high and high school students would enjoy performing and attending performances. It would also be a good selection for community and church theatre groups, especially at Christmas.--R.B.


This dramatization of O'Henry's familiar story is set in New York City in 1905. Jim and Della tell each other stories about King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba which is their way of expressing their dreams, thoughts, and feelings. In the
end they sell their most precious possession to buy the other a Christmas gift. Ironically, this sacrifice makes each gift useless. O'Henry's story centers around Della, and Jim says and does little. In Hischak's version, Jim surfaces a bit more as a person with more to say and do.

The arrangement of scenes and lines works nicely, but the ending seems chopped off and awkward. Because the play is set in another time and is romantic, it is difficult to picture children sitting still through it.

Teens and adults would enjoy performing this. The script would appeal to audiences of the same age group, but only if the characters were presented believably. The play is short so it would work best if combined with other short Christmas plays, skits, or vignettes.—J.C.


The Least of These is a modern Christmas play based on Matthew 25, which requires an ensemble cast, with three characters that remain consistent throughout while the rest of the cast stands as a "living cyclorama" facing upstage (away from the audience) until needed to play a role. There are a variety of characters—human and animal—to be portrayed.

Ellen, Dale and Celia are the three major characters. There is no age specified for them, but they could be from twelve to eighteen. They are on their way to a church youth group pot luck supper and living manger scene. On their way to the party they meet people who need their help. Assisting them slows down their progress and makes them too late to participate in the manger scene, but they realize that their contributions to those in need were far more important than standing as shepherds in a scene.

The dialogue is brief and sometimes quite clever. The situations are interesting. They find a lost child, feed a hungry cat, and turn over their thermos of hot chocolate to a friend who has two paper routes to deliver in the cold of the night. The play moves along at a nice pace. The end of the play would have more impact if less was said. The audience will be more impressed with the visual message found in the manger itself. Having the characters comment on what they find is unnecessary.

The play is short—probably lasting only 10-15 minutes—so it could be combined with other brief plays or skits for a pleasant Christmas program for church or school groups.—J.C.

The story begins in a Sultan's tent where Princess Scheherazade's only escape from being beheaded rests in her ability to weave tales. *Tin Pan Ali* becomes a story within a story as the Princess weaves her 1001th tale. Ali Baba comes to life in this tale as a Chicago street sweeper who becomes involved with the gangster Al Carooni and his gang, in a Robin Hood affair. Ali Babi steals from Carooni's cache of stolen treasures and upgrades his family's lifestyle. Carooni, angered by this threat to his 'belongings' gives up robbery temporarily for spy work as he and his gang search for the unknown thief. Many songs and comic moments keep the action flowing continuously and entertainingly. The delightful characters in Carooni's gang resemble those found in the stories of Damon Runyon. The large cast requirements provide interesting parts for many performers. The set is technically challenging in the alternating fronts that are needed including the warehouse, a two story building. *Tin Pan Ali* is a good work for high school and some junior high theatre groups with finances for an orchestra and large cast costuming.--C.S.