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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews

*Cinderabbit* is a puppet musical written for television, and presumably stage, with specifically-designed puppets by Ronnie Burkett. It is an entertaining adaptation of the Cinderella story, done with animal puppets. The dialogue itself is funny in places, but I feel its strength lies in its visual aspect. Young school children would probably enjoy it, but I feel that the author was trying to bridge the gap so it would be entertaining to older audiences also, by the nature of some of the jokes. A very strong effort. —Darwin Seed

*The Odyssey*, a play about Odysseus's adventures in returning home after the Trojan War, is a well executed dramatization of the famous story. The play delivers the sense of Greek tragedy, but makes it interesting and enjoyable for children as well as adults. The characters are strong and the storyline is easy to follow, although I was afraid it might not be. The death scenes are carefully done so as not to be frightening, but the sense of tragedy is not lost.  
I would like to see this play performed, not only for its historical value, but also for the good entertainment. —Erin Caldwell

*Ride a Blue Horse* is the portrait of a famous personality-in-the-making, James Whitcomb Riley. He is a dreamer who passionately wants to light up the sky with his pocketful of rhymes. Yet his conversation with butterflies gets in the way of the practicalities of life. His absentmindedness gets him in trouble with his teacher and his father, but he redeems himself by helping to hide a runaway slave from the slavehunters. He joins a travelling medicine show as their resident poet, and we guess that the rest is history. He forges on to become America's Hoosier poet.  
Harris transfers the lightness of Riley's poetry into this energetic play with music, but the characters Harris has drawn are one-dimensional. We want to see more conflict and more development. The plot points leave one unsatisfied because the incidents lack potency, urgency and vitality.  
The show adapts well to the needs of a particular production in terms of space, casting, costuming, sets, and props. The concepts presented, such as 'you are special' and 'follow your dream', are particularly idealistic and ego-oriented, but can be fresh and even inspiring to young audiences. —Deborah Pyper

The plays listed above are adapted versions of classic plays, for children in a classroom setting to perform while they are strengthening skills in other academics. Each play includes a detailed director's book with guidelines on incorporating language arts and social studies,
along with instructions on staging a play. Teachers with little or no training in drama who desire to put on a play will find the director's book a godsend. Along with staging and directing helps, motivational questions are given to encourage a complete learning experience for the student. (We, however, did take exception to Howard's reversal of stage directions. After all the trouble to give a complete learning experience, why not teach the stage directions correctly?)

The adaptations themselves, though, are lacking. They have lost what made the original scripts classics. The beauty of the language of the original is lost in an attempt to update the scripts and make them more relevant to today. Sometimes the scripts are even a bit confusing because vital information for the advancement of the plot has been neglected. For example, in the scene from Macbeth where Lady Macbeth enters sleepwalking and talks about the murder of King Duncan committed by her and her husband, Howard's version is as follows:

DOCTOR. How did she get that candle?

LADY-IN-WAITING. She always has one by her, sir. She can't bear the darkness.

DOCTOR. What's she doing now? Rubbing her hands together?

L-I-W. She's always doing that. Sometimes she does it for fifteen minutes at a time.

LADY MACBETH. Still a spot here. Come out, stain. One, two, we should be doing it now. Hell's a dark place. Shame, husband! You are a soldier, but afraid. Doesn't matter who suspects us. Who could have dreamt the old King had so much blood in him?

DOCTOR. Did you hear that?

LADY MACBETH. The Thane of Fife, he had a wife. Where is she now?

GW. She has it lit by her continually. Tis her command.

DOCTOR. Her eyes are open!

GW. Ay, but her senses are shut!

DOCTOR. What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

GW. It is an accustomed action with her to be washing her hands. I have known her to continue this a quarter of an hour.

LADY MACBETH. Yet here's a spot!
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DOCTOR. Hark, she speaks. I will write down what she says to satisfy my remembrance more strongly.

LADY MACBETH. Out, damned spot, out I say! Who would have thought the king to have so much blood in him?

DOCTOR. Do you mark that?

LADY MACBETH. What, will these hands never be clean?

DOCTOR. We have heard what we should not!

GW. She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has done!

LADY MACBETH. Here's the smell of blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh-h-h-h.

DOCTOR. What a sigh! This disease is beyond my practice.

LADY MACBETH. Wash your hands, put on your nightgown! Look not so pale. I tell you again, Banquo's buried... he cannot come out of his grave.

DOCTOR. Terrible!

LADY MACBETH. To bed... to bed! There's a knocking at the gate! Come! Come! Come! Give me your hand! What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed! (Exits)

DOCTOR. Will she now to bed?

GW. Directly.

DOCTOR. More needs she the divine than the physician. Good God forgive us all. So good night. I think, but dare not speak.

GW. Good night, good doctor.

There is so much more magic and beauty to the second, along with it being more theatrical and playable. Howard has made a great effort and as we said before, her director's book is a terrific tool, but we feel there are better adaptations of the classics available, especially Shakespeare, with Albert Cullum's Shake Hands with Shakespeare (which much to our dismay was taken out of print last year, but if enough people make inquiries to the Scholastic Book Service, who published the book, it may be brought back into print.)

The other plays would probably work as well if they were just edited instead of altered. Howard also suggests her scripts to be used for elementary through high school, but we feel that they are only appropriate for grades 5 through 8, and even then, junior high may be too advanced for these scripts. —Erin Caldwell and Dianne Breinholt


Scrooge has moved to Texas and taken the name of G.R. ("Greedy and Rotten"). The story has the same message but is told with a western twist. Some colorful local folk have become the ghosts and "Bah, humbug!" has become "Bull!" A variety of songs and dances add to the hoedown flavor of the show.

This show should be done just for fun and enjoyment. It is a good choice for a community theatre group to do, but I feel that there are better versions available. —Dianne Breinholt