1986

Play Reviews

Harold Oaks

Erin Caldwell

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Play Reviews

    Royalties: first performance, $35; subsequent performances, $32.50.
    This play is based on research into the mythical Oriental Monkey-Monkey. It was created for the Nebraska Theatre Caravan at the request of educators who wanted the South Vietnamese and Laotian children who had recently come to the area to share part of their culture with the mid-western children who were now their neighbors.
    The play very effectively captures the carefree character of this oriental trickster as he defends the monkey clan, discovers a new dwelling-place for them, tricks the Sea God out of his treasures, is successful even in tricking death, but eventually goes too far when he attacks Venus, his patron goddess. It is delightful play that should help bridge the gap between cultures and lead to better understanding.
    It is also fun and exciting the way this script utilizes acrobatics and circus techniques to emphasize the antics of these interesting animals. The set does require a jungle-gym structure, which may require intricate production skills so that no one is injured. I recommend this play for elementary-age children. —Harold Oaks

    This delightful adaptation of Frank Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* captures the vivacious passion and the irrepressible spirit of the original Baum character. She leaps from the page shimmering in her multi-colored patchwork quilt attire, demonstrating the carefree fun of youth and the honest frankness and intelligence of a fresh creation.
Koste uses language extremely well in picturing the Woozy, the Scarecrow, and Ozma of Oz, with lines that describe their individual characters in their phrasing and choice of words. The plot has interesting twists and turns that offer opportunities to examine personalities and differences between people.

The story deals with Ojo, a Munchkin boy whose uncle has been accidentally frozen into stone by a magic spell. He and Scraps and the other characters engage in a search for the ingredients to make a magic potion to free Unc Nunkie. This eventually leads them to the Emerald City and to a successful breaking of the spell and the predictable happy ending. But before that, there are some exciting and rewarding adventures. I recommend this play and feel that you’ll enjoy either reading or producing it. —Harold Oaks


Medea’s Children is a harsh play dealing with the effects of divorce upon children. The language is tough, even coarse, which appears to be an attempt to portray reality in an abstract atmosphere. The mother, Medea, is going mad, while the father, Jason, is taking another lover, and the children, Little Medea and Little Jason, play out their anger by imitating the adults. At one time the children even “pretend” suicide. The children’s nurse has been hired to supervise the children, but she is only an observer until the end, when she takes on both the parents in order to protect the children. The parents are the bad guys until the end, when the children throw the father out, demand that the nurse stay, and then care for their deranged mother. And after all that, the message for children appears to be that they don’t have to feel guilty for their parents’ divorce.

Even though this is a timely play, I’m not sure I would want children in its audience. There are nightmarish scenes that are played out symbolically, and the adults seem not to accept any responsibility for the children. Maybe this would be a good scare tactic for parents considering divorce, but I think it would be too frightening for elementary-age children.

The script is rather confusing, and I assume this is one of those plays that plays better than it reads. Because it is based on mythology, it is staged both in modern and in Greek times, which adds flavor and interest, but one must be familiar with Euripides’ Medea (or at least with the Medea/Jason myth) in order to understand all the implications of the play. It is innovative, thought provoking, and the dialogue is well written, but for a child audience, I don’t recommend it. —Erin Caldwell


Newcomer is a play about Mai Li, a young Southeast Asian student who has recently arrived in the United States. It presents her problems and eventual successes in attending school and in working out some of the transitional difficulties in moving from one culture to another. It also deals with American attitudes toward foreigners, particularly mixed-race or first-generation Americans who are not innately proud of their ancestry.

This play effectively demonstrates the problems of a refugee in an alien system and does end happily. It is written for a cast of five to nine, and is geared toward high-school-age young people. It is set in an urban school system, probably on the West coast. —Harold Oaks