1991

Play Reviews

Rosemarie Howard

Kelli Jo Kerri

Gayanne Ramsden

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol12/iss1/6

This Play Review is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Children's Book and Media Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Tom, a pauper’s son, thinks life would be grand if he were a prince. One day the prince stops a palace guard from beating Tom and then invites the poor boy into this castle room. As Tom describes his life in Offal Court to the Prince, the Prince thinks it sounds like an exciting, free life. In fun, they trade clothes and marvel at how much alike they look. Dressed as the pauper, the Prince steps out of his room to get something and is thrown out of the castle by his own guards. Soon after, the king dies, and as Tom is about to be crowned king of England, the prince returns to claim his father’s throne. Before he can do that, he must prove he is really the Prince.

This is a well-adapted musical version of Mark Twain’s classic tale. The music is nice but not outstanding. It requires a cast of over 24 people, period costumes, and at least two sets. It would probably not travel well. The play would work well for a family audience.

—Rosemarie Howard

C- Boettcher-Tate, Karen. *The Elves and the Shoemaker.*

This fairy tale of the elves who make shoes for a poor shoemaker has a nice twist in that the shoemaker and his wife are very kind hearted and help others without thinking of their own needs. However, the playwright has gone a bit too far in the use of cutsie language.

The dialogue drips with silly endearments exchanged by the shoemaker and his wife—my little snicker doodle, my little artichoke heart, my little raspberry bucket, etc. If this is not enough, these endearments are almost always punctuated with sets of three smacking kisses. The elves use the term “Kowabunga” which seems a little anachronistic.

Some of the characters’ names—Snoobotbottom, Sneerella, Schwartz, Studebaker—do not create consistency in the story setting. One of the elves insists on making running shoes and calling them Rhea Bocks or Nicky’s, after his relatives.

The main offenses, in an otherwise perfectly good story, are the exaggerated sentimentality and the inconsistency of the story setting—it
is neither ancient nor modern—but an unsuccessful mix of the two. Most children might overlook or even enjoy the silly endearments and clever names, but the frequent triplets of kissing would not be successful, even with elementary age children.

—Gayanne Ramsden and Rosemarie Howard

***


Mr. Kelly has created a fun, screwball who-dunit in *My Son is Crazy-But Promising.* A screenwriter, an actress, two secret agents, and a woman waiting to meet extraterrestrials, all converge at the run-down Ritz-Apache Lodge in Tumbleweed, Arizona. There are other misguided souls who are also at the lodge who get involved in this outlandish plot. The gangster with stolen goods, the screenwriter looking for buried treasure, and a body that won’t stay dead, are all part of the ingredients that make up this play.

The story moves quickly and is full of amusing complications as well as fun characters. The characters are, however, somewhat two dimensional stereotypes although high school students would enjoy both seeing and participating in this play. The play is done in a single setting and modern dress which would keep the cost to the minimum and very accessible for high schools. This is an enjoyable mystery that would play well for both junior and senior high. It would also work well in a summer theatre.

—Gayanne Ramsden

***

C Rumble, Patricia Barry. *The Archer and the Princess.*

This story is based on a Russian folk tale and the story itself is delightful and would have made a very good play if the author could have refrained from cutsey asides, slapstick characters, and a TV sitcom format. It is the story of an evil Tsar who wants to marry an archer’s beautiful wife and, in order to get rid of the young man, sends him out to accomplish impossible tasks. The archer’s wife has a magic rug, stone, and ball of yarn that help the young man overcome the three tests.

If the author had presented a magical and fanciful tale without the cutsey language, this would have been an excellent story. However, as
it stands now, it is like much of children’s fare offered in the poorer after-school cartoons. This tale ends with the Tsar turning into a giant chicken who adopts the girl he wanted to marry and is chased by the witch Baba Yaga, who wants to marry him. It takes the beauty of a folktale and turns it into slap stick farce that doesn’t quite work.

—Gayanne Ramsden


This collection of *Six Adventure Theater Plays* is one of the finest collections of children’s plays that this reviewer has ever seen. Unlike many play collections, all the plays in this book may be successfully performed and produced. *Six Adventure Theater Plays* is highly recommended for anyone interested in or involved with children drama. Each play is reviewed below:

**B**

*A Stone that Sings*, 1985, by Irene Elliot.

Irene Elliot has taken the familiar plot of the poor country girl who grows up and finds out she is really a princess, and given it a fresh new twist. *A Stone that Sings* is a choose-your-own ending play that is perhaps better defined as choose-you-own-middle play. A wizardess acts as narrator, interrupting the action periodically by asking the audience to decide which choices the characters should make. No matter what the audience decides, the ending always comes out the same, but this unique format offers eight possible scenarios of getting to this ending.

Children ages six through twelve would enjoy the versatility of being able to make choices for the actors. However, those not taken by the “choosing” novelty may become bored with the play’s often conveniently contrived situations and characters. The plot itself is quite weak and the villain’s motivation is unclear.

While *A Stone that Sings* is more well-written than many fantasy children’s plays on the market, and has a great gimmick, it is not as strong a piece of literature as the other plays in this collection. With good actors, costumes, and sets, *A Stone that Sings* would be a lot of fun, but not anything more.

—Kelli Jo Kerri
A Golliwhoppers!, 1972, by Flora Atkin.

K+ Characters and themes from the Tall Tales of the American frontier to the ancient legends of American Indian folklore are dramatized by an ensemble of players in Golliwhoppers! Using a wide range of theatrical forms such as mime, puppetry, story telling, dance, and music, the ensemble creates eight tales from American folklore, representing legends from several geographical and cultural groups. Music, singing, and changing are used during the tales as an effective transitional element.

Atkin’s Golliwhoppers! is an excellent play that, if done well, would captivate audiences of all ages. The outlandish comedy of the tall tales is captured by the larger than life dramatization using homespun music and exaggerated puppets and movements on a nearly bare stage. Students of all age groups, from kindergarten up, would enjoy seeing the play. Golliwhoppers! is a heartily recommended as both a touring and permanent show.

—Kelli Jo Kerri


K-6 This fifteen minute play is excerpted from a full-length play, also by Edward Tamulevich, called Rikki Tikki Tavi and Other Tales of Rudyard Kipling. Using actors, puppets, and story-telling theater, the play dramatizes the tale of Rikki Tikki Tavi, a little mongoose that kills an entire family of cobras, saving the lives of his animal playmates and the humans who befriend him. The dialogue has a foreign flavor to giving the impression of India. The language of Kipling is beautiful and eloquent. Children will enjoy the animals that are puppets. However, the play’s short length makes it most suitable as an introduction to another play, workshop, or as a class project for children fourth grade and up. Kindergarten through sixth grade would enjoy this show.

—Kelli Jo Kerri

B+ The Cricket on the Hearth, 1984, by Helen Avery.

9+ Avery’s adaption is true to Charles Dicken’s Christmas tale about three families that find happiness at Christmas through the wisdom and good luck of a cricket kept by the hearth. In dream sequences that could use music and dance, the cricket teaches the characters about love and faith.
While Avery’s adaptation is adequate, the language is occasionally awkward, interrupting the flow of the piece. Towards the end of the play, the villain makes an abrupt change from bad to good that is poorly motivated and consequently little understood. While these problems make the play a poor choice for year-round production, the Victorian setting, Christmas carols, and charm of Dickens, create a Christmas spirit mood that would be enjoyed by family audiences during the holiday season.

—Kelli Jo Kerri


*The Purple Fan* is a well-written comical play that is done in traditional Chinese Theater. This is the ancient story of a young peasant who, with the help of a ghost, sets out to find the lost prince. The peasant has found the purple fan that can identify the lost prince; for when the lost prince is tapped on the head with the magical purple fan, bells will sound. This play is staged in Oriental theatrical style, complete with chorus, prop man, and instrumentalist. All ages would enjoy the comic characters, witty asides, and lyrical dance sequences of the piece, making *The Purple Fan* an excellent choice for performance by ages Junior High through adult, and for audiences kindergarten and up. This play is ideal for touring because it demands very little in the way of props and set. A talented cast, director, and choreographer could create a stunning production using only the actors’ bodies and movements to represent everything from trees to storms.

—Kelli Jo Kerri

**Twelve Dancing Princesses**, 1955.

Elizabeth Goodwyn and Helen Jordan have done an excellent job in adapting the fairy tale of twelve princesses who, unknown to their uncle, the king, dance their shoes to threads each night at a magical ball. The miserly king, outraged by the expense of replacing the shoes, offers any princess in marriage to the young man who can discover the secret of the worn-out shoes.

*Twelve Dancing Princesses* would be delightful for children ages six through fourteen. The twelve silly princesses, along with their ridiculously stingy uncle, make colorful characters who add a touch of farce to the fairy tale. The set, too, compliments the farce with a huge bed which all twelve princesses share. This play is particularly well
suited for performance by high school students because the characters are imaginative, yet not complex. The only flaw is that we need more information about the youngest sister whom Conrad, the young man who discovers their secret, marries. The emphasis is on the eldest sister, and the youngest sister is mentioned only incidentally. However, as a children’s theater piece, *Twelve Dancing Princesses* would be a fine choice for a beginning or intermediate drama curriculum.

—Kelli Jo Kerri

***


Wolf and his animal friends begin a rehearsal of the play “Little Red Riding Hood” by handing out flowers to audience members. The story unfolds in the traditional way. At the end of the story, as the wolf is being blamed for trying to harm Granny and Little Red Riding Hood, he calls a halt to the play and demands that his version of the tale be told. So the play begins again with Red being portrayed as a brat to whom granny and the wolf are trying to teach a lesson. Although the wolf makes a great attempt, he is misunderstood by the woodsman. Granny won’t support his side of the story and Red gets “good press” while the wolf gets the rap. At the end of the play, the wolf is still begging the audience to remember that he is really a good guy.

This unique adaptation of a popular fairy tale should appeal to young audiences because of the animals and chase scenes. It would also probably be fun for family audiences in a summer theatre setting as a melodrama-type presentation. It might also be a good play for children to perform. While the dialogue is not very original, it is natural and the story moves quickly. Set and cast requirements are minimal and the play would travel well.

—Gayanne Ramsden and Rosemarie Howard

***