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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews

B+  Boettcher-Tate. The Emperor’s New Clothes.  

This zany adaptation from the folktale of an emperor who, because of greed and pride, is tricked into wearing "magic" clothes that aren’t really there, adheres closely to the original story line. However, this author has created a more sympathetic character (in the emperor) by elaborating on the story and circumstances. Although we are reminded that the emperor used to be a good ruler, before he and his family became so selfish, many characters, such as the idiot doctors that swarm over the hypochondriac emperor, add to the comic quality of the play while demonstrating just how low the emperor has sunk.

Elementary-aged children would especially enjoy seeing this play, while actors, looking for good character roles, would enjoy its production. The Emperor’s New Clothes is recommended for performance by Jr. High and older actors for elementary audiences.

—Kelli Jo Kerry

A-  Burchard, Rachael. Hallelujah Hopscotch.  

Hallelujah Hopscotch is a fairy who likes children. Because of disobedience, she is sent by the Fairy Queen to spend a day with some children. Before the day is finished, she must make one child—who previously didn’t believe in fairies—believe in her and see and hear her. If any child should say (three times) that he or she doesn’t believe in fairies, Hallelujah Hopscotch will die. Hallelujah goes to the children’s backyard. There, all the children except Robert can see her. Eventually Robert can see her, but the Queen Fairy banishes Hallelujah for refusing to obey her. When the Queen and the other fairies leave, Hallelujah doesn’t know where to live; but Robert tells her she can live in the imagination of children.

This is a charming play that would make an excellent production for an elementary school to do. There is music and dance, and there can be as many children in the cast as need be. The set would need to be a children’s playground and it would be best if there could be a slide. Probably, the play would be best for the lower grades. The dialogue is
very natural for children and the fact that the fairies speak in rhyme makes it fun. This is a story that encourages fantasy and imagination in a child.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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A- Cook, Pat. *Three Murders and It's Only Monday.*  

The play is about a detective and a group of suspects, each with a possible connection to a series of murders. It is written in the best Agatha Christie style, with surprising plot twists and revelations about each character's secret identity. We begin with, not three, but four murders, (one does not count, since the victim is a dummy). One by one, there are more murders and the detective (named "Monday") has his hands full. The ending is surprising and delightful and fun.

The play is suitable for high school audiences as well as junior high, but it would be entertaining for adults and young children as well. A skillful director could put this play on for a high school or junior high audience, or for a good children’s theatre community group. Some elementary students could even handle the parts. The plot line is clever and fast-paced and interesting, and the story moves delightfully to a conclusion with old-fashioned "thriller" appeal. The script is designed to accommodate a varying number of actors, and the play can be presented with a minimum of expense and trouble. It is short and provides some good acting opportunities for the cast members. The director will need to be careful to pace the play slowly enough so that the audience does not become completely confused at the rapid discovery of each clue.

—Noreen Astin

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Alexandria, Nebraska has no library, but George, a new boy in town, wants to start one. He is a boy who loves books, and his favorite companions are those from books. As he talks to these characters, we see them: Sherlock Holmes, the famous detective, D'artagnan from the *Three Musketeers*, and the dog, Lassie. The audience also sees and hears them. George is friends with Marty, a girl who helps him start the library. However, most of the kids in the town make fun of George
and ridicule his love of books. It is only when the neighborhood kids threaten to destroy George's books that he learns the lessons of courage of which his books speak.

This one act musical is a good vehicle for teaching the importance of books and how they can teach such attributes as individuality and courage. It would play well for kids grades 4-6, although the younger grades would enjoy Lassie. For my part, Lassie "Aooooing" is the weakest part of the script. It also portrays adults in an unfavorable light.

This play would work well either as a school presentation or a class workshop. There would need to be some costuming, and there are several different set locations, but they could be portrayed simply.

—Gayanne Ramsden


In the world of Pern, dragonriders protect the planet from life-threatening threat that can kill its inhabitants. In this society, where dragonriders are the elite and revered, Menolly, a young girl from a fishing village, desires, above all, to be a bard. She wants more than anything to compose music. Her father, however, is a traditionalist and doesn't believe girls should be singers or composers. How Menolly is able to fulfill her dreams is the story of the play Dragonsong.

Adapted from Anne McCaffrey's book, the play lacks the complexity and depth of the novel; however, on the whole, it is a good adaptation. There are many things that would particularly appeal to younger children such as a dragon and singing fire lizards. Elliot uses puppets for the fire lizards which should delight children of all ages.

The fantasy of the story has also been retained from the original which should make an enjoyable performance for both adult and children viewers. Also, adolescents will identify with the fifteen-year-old Menolly who desires to pursue her dreams and become a master harpist at any cost.

There are two parts of the play which seem to be extraneous. At the beginning of the play, there is a voice over saying a spacecraft is landing on Pern. It is distracting and unnecessary. The audience will accept that the play is in a different world, and it is evident that the story takes place on a different planet. Also, there is an incident in the play where one of Menolly's friends from her fishing world tames a dragon. This incident is superfluous for the story and is not even found
in the book. However, most of the play is enjoyable and it would make a good production.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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A MacLeod, Doug. *My Son the Lawyer is Drowning.*

The Isaac’s family is in a turmoil; their son wants to marry an Iguanodon, and the mother and father are hearing the voice of God from the TV and the dishwasher. It seems that the Almighty is tired of what the human race is doing to the planet and so He is going to bring on another flood. Alan and Miriam Isaacs are to be the only people saved. They are to build an ark and the Iguanodons will gather the animals. But what will happen to Danny (still in love with the Iguanodon, Rainbow) and the grandmother, Ritka? How it all turns out makes for a delightful spoof, and yet, at the same time, makes some fairly serious environmental commentary.

The play is well-written and the comic element is excellent. It would do well for high school or adult audiences. The characters are fun and original, although the potential director should be aware that the treatment of the character of God is somewhat irreverent. It is all done in fun however, and is very humorous. It is written by award winning Australian author, Doug MacLeod who has written children’s books, and radio and television programs. I highly recommend it.

—Gayanne Ramsden

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C+ Morris, Vera. *My Name is Rumpelstiltskin.*

Here is the traditional tale of the Miller’s daughter who is asked to spin straw into gold. She is able to accomplish this task with the help of a gnome who requests her firstborn child in exchange. The play follows the old tale, but adds a court of characters. It also places the tale in a kingdom which is financially broke. It is thus very important to the Queen (who is regent) to acquire a daughter-in-law who can spin gold. Other additions to the plot include a witch who helps Laura, the miller’s daughter, find out the gnome’s name. Also, in this version, the gnome wants the child to be the most powerful being in the kingdom.
While the story gives us more motivation than the fairy tale and the plot is expanded, it is done in an off-the-cuff manner, not in the believably magic style of the folktale. There is no mystery or illusion of fairyland. The humor is somewhat lame, coming from the characters, particularly in a jester who repeats everything that is said by the Queen. As for the rest of the characters, they lack dimension and originality.

The play would be easy to produce as the spinning into gold happens off stage; the sets would be a forest and a throne room. Younger children would enjoy producing it, and it would best be used as a classroom project.

—Gayanne Ramsden


*Scripture Plays* is a compilation of ten plays from the Old and New Testament. It includes plays in a traditional format about Moses; Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego; Adonijah; Elijah; and Esther. There are participation plays of Gideon, Naboth’s Vineyard, Daniel in the Lion’s Den, and Jonah. There is also a one-person dramatization of the incidents from the life of Paul. All of the plays adhere closely to the scriptures and would be excellent for Sunday school presentations. Each single play is a little short for individual productions, but they would do very well for a church classroom situation or for several of the plays to be performed for a church audience.

Mr. Neidermeyer does a good job at adapting the stories, although the participation plays usually have only one incident of audience involvement. It would be better in a participation play to have the audience more involved throughout the play. I do think, however, that these plays would have a large audience interest—probably from grade 4 through grade 12—and any teacher of Sunday school could use them to supplement class material. The plays are a good way to teach gospel principles for a diverse audience.

—Gayanne Ramsden
The Trial of Goldilocks is a one act fairy tale fantasy play in verse that puts Goldilocks—of three bears' fame—on trial for breaking and entering the three bears' home. The verse is well-written, seeming contrived in only a few instances. Perhaps the most enjoyable part is the sentencing when the jury finds the lawyers guilty of telling tall tales, sentencing them to listen to windbag layers all day as they serve as judge and clerk. The Trial of Goldilocks presents three different versions of the fairy tale and provides fun, simple acting parts for inexperienced adolescent actors. This play is recommended for performance by fifth grade through junior high for elementary audiences. The play is also available as a operetta.

—Kelli Jo Kerry

Wishes

Carrie and Scuggs Grinder are children in a dysfunctional home. They are both unhappy because their parents argue all of the time. Carrie wishes for someone to make her parents happy and finds herself in the Wizzle's kingdom. There, she finds her wish may come true if she washes enough diapers. Finally, she learns that the Wizzle is a fake wizard and can't make her parents love each other and that she can only wish for things that she can have some control over.

This story doesn't have any magical answers for children who come from unhappy homes. It teaches that an individual has the power to make himself or herself happy and that we cannot control another's emotions. While the moral is very good, the story is a little silly and contrived. Still, for younger children, it has a good message and some of the animal and magical creatures would be appreciated.

—Gayanne Ramsden