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**Play Reviews**

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Play Reviews

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**A- Pre-3**

Reviewed by Gayanne Ramsden

*Clown’s Play* is an adaptation of “Jack and the Beanstalk.” At the beginning of the play, a group of clowns who have been ushers—and who have given an intro act—realize that the regular actors are unable to perform. The clown decides to put on the show. With few props, and the use of blocks and a ladder, they create a production.

This is a participation play by adults to be performed for children. The parts where the child audience interacts with the clown is well integrated into the plot. There is no “participation business” that is extraneous. While the play is billed as a play performed by adults, junior and senior high school students could perform it for younger children. This is a fun, creative adaption where the cow talks and the giant retires from the giant business. It is recommended for younger children.

★★★★★


**C- 9-12**

Reviewed by Kelli Jo Kerry

The play begins on a playground with the actors, portraying themselves as children, acting out scenes. The play continues with short scenes of the same actors in high school and college concluding with their ten-year reunion.

The play contains some interesting character studies, but fails to go anywhere with these characters. The beginnings of a plot are formed between two sets of characters; however, the playwright does not follow through with the story. While *Rocka-Good-Bye* is often interesting as a character study, it fails to unify the characters into a cohesive piece, leaving the play incomplete and disjointed.

★★★★★

**A- K-8** 

Reviewed by Gayanne Ramsden

This play brings to the stage the wonderful tale of Dorothy and her friends: the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion. Dorothy is hurtled into the Land of Oz by a hurricane. She seeks to return to her home in Kansas with aid of the Scarecrow who wants a brain, the Tin Woodman who wants a heart, and the Lion who wants courage. All of them set out to the Emerald City to seek the aid of the Wizard of Oz. The play shows how Dorothy and her friends already have the traits and means to attain what they desire; but before they obtain their gifts, they defeat the wicked witch and learn the secret of the wizard. Finally, their desires are granted and the story ends happily with Dorothy returning to Kansas.

This classic tale has been well-adapted for the stage. Martens gives excellent stage directions for what might be difficult aspects to produce. She also recommends that each set for the different cities be painted a different color. This would make for a very colorful production.

There are many excellent character roles in *The Wizard of Oz* which children and teenagers would enjoy performing. This play could be performed by lower or upper grades. High school students could be used to play for younger children. The story moves well and would be appreciated by elementary and school ages.


dd


**A K-Adult** 

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard and Noreen Astin

The tale of *The Magic Fishbone,* by Dickens, has been crafted into an entertaining musical for the stage. The king can’t balance the budget and is waiting for payday to arrive. The queen is having trouble keeping the castle clean and getting meals ready because the kingdom can’t afford to pay servants. Princess Alicia can’t understand why her wishes aren’t magically granted as they seem to be in other kingdoms. Grandmarina is a magical and practical fairy godmother who allows the princess to use the magic fishbone and have one single wish which will come true when the time is right. Not wanting to waste her wish, the princess begins to do many things on her own to improve the
family’s circumstances. Finally, she unselfishly allows the king to have her only wish, and the family’s financial situation is improved. Princess Alicia is then allowed to marry the industrious fishmonger who becomes a prince. The family learns that magic is often brought about when people do the very best they can.

The plot is clever, fast-paced, and entertaining, and the play reinforces the virtues of initiative and industry. The play could be performed simply and inexpensively. The playwright recommends using a unit set, but the play could be performed with a simple set and work well as a touring production. The play could be performed by junior-high- or high-school-aged actors and should be enjoyed by an audience of elementary-age children through adults. The tunes are melodic and memorable and the lyrics are clever and easily sung. The play requires six actors: three male and three female (although one of the males is a page and could be played by either sex). All of the six should be singers. The play is recommended.

♦♦♦♦

Foxton, David. *Perkin and the Pastrycook*. Samuel French LTD. 8 males (some could be played by females), 2 females, ladies in waiting, soldiers. 2 settings (palace, wilderness).

A- K-9 Reviewed by Kelli Jo Kerry and Noreen Astin

*Perkin and the Pastrycook* opens immediately following the fiasco of *The Emperor’s New Clothes* with the two weavers tricking Wat, the palace excook (banished by the handyman’s assistant), into helping them escape. To avoid punishment by the emperor, Wat and Perking (the palace handyman) set out to recapture the weavers, and the two have a number of exciting adventures. The princess joins them (dressed as a beggar) and Perkins ends up saving a life and being knighted. Although he does not try to defeat his opponent, Perkins is later called upon to joust, and some of the adventure of former days is brought out. Perkin and Wat are blamed with the abduction of the princess, and things look bad for them for a time. Eventually, justice is restored and the deceivers are caught. Princess Sophie confesses that Perkin and Wat were not entirely to blame, and she eventually marries Perkin, and his job is restored.

The play contains many entertaining elements that would appeal to young audiences. It could be staged either elaborately or inexpensively with a lot of color and interesting costume and set suggestions. Other class members could be used to serve as various parts of the forest and other pieces of the set. The plot is clever and fast-moving with a great deal of action; and while the story is a continuation of the tale of the Emperor’s New Clothes, the audience does not need to know that tale in order to enjoy this play. The play is suitable for performances by and for elementary-age through at least junior-high-school-
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ages and could even be enjoyed by high school and adult audiences. The third act, however, tends to drag as many of the play’s conclusions are either resolved or implied by the end of the second act. The third act could probably be cut in length and included with the second act, or eliminated altogether, to maintain audience interest.

Kelly, Tim. *Song of the Mounties*. Pioneer Drama Service. 8 female. 6 male (1 could be female).

B+ K-9 Reviewed by Noreen Astin

*Song of the Mounties* is a farce in the modern “mellerdrammer” style that features a Mountie, Sergeant Bob Sledd, and his love, Claudette. Claudette receives a treasure map which she is instructed to hold for old man Zachariah’s niece Lizzie, because Zachariah fears he will be killed by the villains (Dirty Jake and Skipalong) since he has discovered gold and someone has been shooting at him. It appears that Zachariah gets killed and Mayo, a vamp, accuses the hero, Bob, of killing the old man. The wedding between Claudette and Bob is postponed because Bob is taken to jail. Dirty Jake wants to marry Claudette, partly to get the map and be rich since Mayo knows that Claudette has the map. Eventually, the truth is made clear. The hero did not kill the old man, in fact no one did; they only thought he was dead. So, the villains are punished for previous crimes and the couple are able to proceed with their happy plans.

The story is a cute little farce, typical of the things that Western resort communities might staff in an outdoor theatre, and it could play to adults if adults played the roles. High school students would enjoy presenting this piece, too, and it could be done simply or elaborately, depending on the budget for costumes and sets. If the cast size were limited, several characters could be cut out, and, if more people wanted to play roles, there are several places where groups could be used in the play. The cast size is quite flexible. The play is silly, the characters are strictly stereotypical, and there is no deep inner meaning to the play; but it serves its purpose and entertains. Is a light piece, full of opportunity for “shtick” and exaggerated acting and booing and cheering and audience participation, if the director desires.

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C 7-12

Reviewed by Noreen Astin

This play is about a group of high school students who decide to have a spook alley party at an old abandoned house. There is a legend that a mad doctor once lived there and performed experiments on the dead. As the young people are setting up the old house, they meet an odd fellow who claims to own the place. One of the students falls asleep and has a dream that the fellow is actually the mad doctor and that he is turning the teenagers into ghouls. Soon, ghouls are seen on the stage, frightening the young people. Then, one by one, the young people suddenly become ghouls and the nightmare becomes reality. The odd fellow was the doctor and the legend never died.

The play is suitable for high school or junior high performers and audiences, and it has potentially interesting visual effects as well as the opportunity for a lot of performers to play in a rather low-cost and undemanding experience. It does offer a lighthearted and modern script. Drawbacks include the fact that the script seems a bit trivial and contrived, and it gives neither the audience nor the actors any enrichment.


A 5-Adult

Reviewed by Kelli Jo Kerry

Human interference in the Everglade’s delicate ecology has destroyed much of the deer’s food. Consequently, the Everglades can no longer support all the deer and a mercy killing is planned to reduce the deer population. The play focuses on a family’s struggle as its members are divided in reluctant support of and opposition to the killing.

The play’s greatest strength lies in its ability to stimulate thought as it neither condemns nor condones the hunt, but presents the tragedy of the situation. Based on a real mercy killing, the play raises challenging questions of moral responsibility and mercy. Consequently it would be best used as an introduction to discussion and is recommended for this purpose. The play could be performed by grades 9 though adult for audiences grades 5 through adult.

**B+ K-6**

Sheila and Lori Heindel

Gayanne Ramsden reviewed this play in the March/April, 1992 issue of *CBR*. Pioneer Drama Service has since submitted another title called *Jack and the Giant* with musical score and tape. The play is basically the same as reviewed, but with the upbeat music and lyrics added by Bill Francour, it is more enjoyable for a broader range of children. The music seems to pick up the pace and add more appeal to an otherwise overdone story.

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**C 9-12** Reviewed by Kelli Jo Kerry

The play opens during the present at an awards ceremony for James Madison High School’s Alumni Award. Elaine, an author and the guest of honor, begins her speech which fades into a flashback to high school. Several scenes from the high school’s past are then performed until we are brought back to the present with Elaine’s closing remarks about the value of memories. High School life and its problems are sentimentally and stereotypically portrayed in this script. While the author creates some interesting character studies with this piece, the work lacks a plot—making it something closer to a collection of skits rather than a play. Consequently, this play is not recommended for performance; however, some portions of the script may be useful as classroom monologues or scenes for beginning drama students.

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