1992

Play Reviews

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B+ Family

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

In this musical adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, the Beast, along with the regular role, serves as a voice over narrator. This helps simplify the story and allows the action to take place in only two locations: the Beast’s castle and the merchant’s poor cottage.

The basic storyline has been maintained, with the two sisters (Jeanette and Adelle) providing some comedy with their ridiculous pining and inept homemaking abilities.

The music is well-written with singable tunes and catchy rhythms. There is an interesting mixture of rock and lyrical ballad-type tunes. The finale, which sounds like gospel rock, is the only song that doesn’t quite seem to fit. Maybe it’s because this reviewer expected a more "romantic"-sounding song as a finale. All five actors need to have strong singing voices. The vocal score, as written, demands that Beauty have a better than average soprano voice (up to high A and B flat). Otherwise, the music must be sung an octave lower, or transposed.

Overall, it is a fun, fast-moving version of a well-known fairy tale that would be appreciated by all ages, but teenagers would especially relate to the music and relatively modern approach of this adaptation. Five actors are needed: three women and two men. A talented group of high school students would probably enjoy performing this play for family audiences. It could tour easily if the set and costuming were kept simple. However, it could also be staged very elaborately.


A K-3

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

Three wizards—Wonder Wanda, Magnificent Merlin, and Do-nothing Dale—all hope to win the trophy Princess Patricia gives at her birthday party each year to the most clever wizard. Wanda and Merlin make fun of Dale because she can’t do the same kind of magic they can.
Through the help of Marilyn Melody, Coco the Clown, and Depressed Daisy, Dale discovers the magic in herself and wins the trophy at Princess Patricia’s party in this audience participation play. Three actors and a pianist, who also takes an acting part, play all the characters. This would be an easy show to tour. It uses a minimum of props and costume pieces and requires very little or no scenery. The music is lively and suits the story. It would play well to grades K-3.


Career Fair concerns three teenagers who are waylaid by an evil impresario, Professor Barker, on their way to a special event at their school—a fair at which they are to see examples of different professional occupations. Jack and Jill, twin brother and sister, are accompanied by their friend and sometime leader, Alice. On the way, they also meet Holly Coast, a school janitor. Holly turns out to be somewhat other than she appears, for she knows all about Professor Barker and exactly WHO HE IS (heh, heh, heh). Professor Barker shows the three a variety of different professions: soldier, lawyer, doctor, and business executive, trying to get them to "sign a contract" with each one. The thread that unites all these exemplars is their greed and desire for power at any cost. Eventually, the children must choose their destinies, and they are saved by Jill's love for her brother with the assistance of Holly Coast.

This play has some very inventive staging ideas, humorous characters, such as Sue de Panzoff, attorney at law, and some excellent writing. Unfortunately, the plot reminded me of a Care Bears movie. It is contrived and heavily moralistic. In addition, it shows only the negative aspects of the careers in question. This is a play for pre-teenagers rather than teenagers. However, it is upbeat, theatrical, and has some valuable things to say about the choices which young adults must make in creating their lives. I enjoyed it.

Reviewed by Mary Randak

**B K-6**

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

This version of the timeless classic is retold in a unique, almost cartoon-like way. It is entertaining, but not the story most people would expect. There are a rather bumbling king and queen, Briar Rose, Prince Alexander, a very efficient Prime Minister, a high-strung cook, a set of good witches, and the bad witch, Evilina. Prince Alexander is betrothed to Princess Briar Rose at her christening as is a guest at her sixteenth birthday party. Evilina makes him believe he is a frog. He overcomes this spell with the help of the good witches and goes on to conquer three obstacles Evilina has placed in the way of his saving Princess Briar Rose: a false princess, a wall of thorns, and the Dark Knight. After Prince Alexander defeats the Dark Knight, Evilina (who is reminiscent of Disney’s bad fairy, complete with a spider and a cat) changes her evil ways.

The cast consists of 25 members. More than one part may be played by the same actor if necessary. Additional court members and good witches can be added if desired. The cat and the spider can be played by puppets or by costumed actors. High school students might enjoy performing this play for an elementary audience. It could also be performed by elementary students as a class project.

★★★★

Rabin, Arnold. *The Outing.* Anchorage Press, 1992. 53 pp. 2 male, 3 female (principles) and 2-3 male, 2-3 female additional, with provision for as many as desired in crowd scenes.

**A- K-9**

Reviewed by Noreen Astin

The plot involves Walter, a young man who is talented in writing and the arts, but who is not athletic. He feels inadequate and insecure because his father is a very athletic, competitive man who pushes his son into athletic events in which the boy fails. Walter is picked on by schoolmates, but his mother consoles him. Walter’s father does not understand, and Walter’s sister is also somewhat insensitive as she has picked up her father’s desire and ability in the field of competitive athletics. The title *The Outing* refers to an annual picnic overseen by the father, which focuses on a series of competitive races and athletic events. Walter dreads this activity, since he knows he will again look bad in his father’s eyes. Walter has a dream that he hits a baseball out of the park and is cheered and praised. He awakens and realizes this was a dream,
and he prays for rain so that he won't have to go to the outing. The day comes and the family goes to the outing, however, and the sister excels and Walter fails, as usual. He does, however, get some praise for his writing ability from a person at the outing. After the outing, Walter overhears his father and mother quarreling, and his father expresses his disappointment in his only son. Walter sneaks off and begins to pack to run away. The mother helps the father to realize that Walter has value and does not need to be exactly like the father, and eventually the boy and his father are reconciled.

The subject matter of the play is extremely important, and the play shows the boy's misery very clearly in a very dramatic way. The end may be too quick and simplistic a solution for the depth of the problem, but the enactment of feelings and relationships within the family is excellent and could make a very good springboard for valuable class discussion on a very real and unfortunate problem in our society. The actors should be mature enough to enact dramatic scenes without silliness. There is very little required in set and costume needs. The play could be very useful for many age groups (including parents), as the need to be accepted and appreciated for our own uniqueness is a universal hunger. The reviewer recommends the play.


**A 5-Adult**

*Shakespeare's Clowns* is an educational touring show written by two members of the Early Stages Family Theatre at Stages Repertory Theatre, Houston, Texas. It requires 3 actors and 3 actresses and is designed for a bare stage with a single free-hung drape. As the actors enter, they bring all their props in two trunks. Each scene is introduced by means of a sign posted on an easel.

Within this simple format, the authors have created a funny and informative show focusing on the various types of clowns in Shakespeare's plays. They include classic comic scenes such as the play of Pyramus and Thisbe from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Dogberry scene from *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the basket scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The show is kept fast paced by the clowning and horseplay of the actors between scenes. Be warned . . . this is a very physical play!

There are a number of things to recommend *Shakespeare's Clowns*. First, it presents its material without altering Shakespeare's language or in any way talking down to the children for whom it is designed. The fast and funny
pace of the show has a momentum that will keep children interested even if they don’t catch all the words. Second, it presents a great deal of interesting and relevant information about Shakespeare and his day during the transitions between comic scenes without becoming "talky." Third, the authors demonstrate the range of Shakespeare’s plays by alternating "traditional" with "non-traditional" production concepts in the comic segments. For example, the scene from Much Ado About Nothing is played as "Dogberry of Mayberry," with Dogberry as Barney Fife, Second Watch as Andy, and Verges as Gomer Pyle.

All in all, I found this a delightful show which would be an excellent choice for touring because of its technical simplicity and its content. Recommended for professional or very experienced actors.


B+ Family Audiences

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

This adaptation portrays the Snow Queen as a wicked woman who has an evil mirror created to make people see only reflections of ugliness. Kai and Gerda are happy friends until slivers of the mirror lodge in Kai’s eye and heart. The Snow Queen steals him away to live with her in the cold North country. Gerda, his faithful and loving friend, searches until she finds him, removes the slivers, and takes him home.

The basic Andersen story has been maintained throughout most of the script. However, at the end of the story, Gerda calls upon the children of the world (the audience) to help her in chanting a spell to call the North Wind for help to fight the Snow Queen. There is no previous interaction with the audience, but with the right actress cast as Gerda, the moment could probably work.

The play has been written in one act with eleven scenes. One of the challenging things in adapting this story for stage is that it takes place in at least ten different settings. The playwright has given some suggestions for scenery, but left the problem basically for the director to figure out. Many of the scenes are short, and the scenery would have to be well-designed, simple, and easily and efficiently moved to keep the story flowing through transitions.

Twelve actors are required: 1 men, 5 women, 2 boys, 2 girls, and 4 fantasy creatures. Additional actors could be used to play some of the fantasy creatures such as flowers and butterflies. Playing time is approximately 60 minutes. If the scenery were very simple, this show would tour well.
A Family Audiences Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

Frances Hodgson Burnett’s classic tale of Mary, an orphan girl who is sent to live at the estate of a bereaved uncle, and Colin, his invalid son, has been well adapted using the story theatre technique. Mary and Colin, through the help of Dickon, his sister Martha, and a sassy robin, discover the healing and growing that comes from working and reaching outside oneself. The "secret garden," which has been neglected just as the children have, blossoms under their care. The children blossom because they care for the garden. Much of the author’s original language has been preserved in the dialogue and transitional monologues.

An optional musical underscore, not available to this reviewer, is available.

The play requires 5 men, 3 women, and 1 robin (a puppet). Although an elaborate set could be used, simply suggesting the scenery would keep the focus on the story, where it belongs. If the scenery were kept to the simple essentials, the play would be relatively simple to stage and would tour effectively.


B+ K-9 Reviewed by Noreen Astin

This play is the familiar tale of Pinocchio with a few modifications. The story is cleverly introduced by the acting company as if they were not yet in character for the play, and there is opportunity for actor improvisation and the taking of different roles by the cast. They decide on a story and its elements among themselves and try to add their own views. One actor becomes a large stick of firewood which will later be carved into Pinocchio. The group of actors respond in unison to several points as the story line is laid out in the beginning.

In the beginning, the Pinocchio character shows more disobedience and rudeness in this play than does the character in the original tale. Thus, the misfortunes that come to Pinocchio seem to be justified. The plot of this play differs from that of the original story in that Pinocchio meets the Blue Fairy and repents of his wrongs in the middle of the play and then relapses into his
deceitful ways immediately afterward. While that scenario may be more humanly accurate, it does not work as well with plot structure for this reviewer.

The cast is large (20 actors plus townspeople) and there are several challenging staging situations such as the whale’s interior and mouth and the growing nose. However, the production could be an enjoyable one that offers many interesting and imaginative acting possibilities.

The music is not quite as charming and original as the script; however, it is simple to learn and even melodic in places. The script is strong enough that it could be successfully staged without the music, if desired. The play could be performed by high school, junior high school, or elementary school actors for elementary and junior high school audiences.

★★★★★

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