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Play Reviews

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PLAY REVIEWS


Artie centers around the relationship between Lee Singer, just turning thirteen, and Artie, a mentally retarded seventeen-year-old. Lee has always befriended and taken care of Artie, but now that she is entering junior high and plans to become involved in extra curriculum activities, she is confronted with peer pressure to disown Artie who is socially unacceptable. Yet the relationship between the two is very deep and real in contrast with the superficial relationships exhibited by the other characters. Still, Lee is faced with a real dilemma--it is time for her to "grow-up." But what about Artie? He never will.

The play has a very small cast of six. Artie's character is particularly convincing and moving. This challenging role requires an actor with a keen sensitivity and empathy for those who struggle with a handicap such as mental retardation. The play is thought-provoking as well as emotionally stirring. It brings to light the indifference and callous treatment towards handicapped individuals whose feelings are often ignored or dismissed by those who are non-disabled. Lee Singer's relationship with Artie suggests a positive alternative approach to treating and managing the handicapped individual.

The script does have a few apparent flaws with characterization. Some of the characters tend to be presented as rather shallow stereotypes. Also, some of the dialogue between the minor characters is rather dull and uninteresting. In particular, Missy's lines tend to be repetitious and limited to excessive name-calling and complaints about Monkey or Artie. For the most part, however, the script is convincing and most appropriate for high school performances.

-- Violet Balzan


A group of actors warm up, argue in French and gradually segue into "American." Scanarelle, a woodcutter, is an Aristole[sic]-quoting braggart who is always affectionately arguing with his wife, Martine. Tired of all this, she plays a trick on him by setting him up as a great retired doctor. Scanarelle is soon trapped into finding a cure for old Geronte's daughter, Lucinda, who can't, or won't, talk. Geronte wants to marry her off to rich old Elmer, whom she detests. After fooling Geronte with some "Latin," and with the help of Leandere, Lucinda's true love, Scanarelle cures the daughter's illness and gets Geronte's blessing for their marriage.
CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW 33

Unfortunately, he still remains convinced "that a man of my GENIUS can Always Succeed--at Anything--Without Really Trying!"

This new farce, "freely and Frenchly" derived from Moliere's The Doctor in Spite of Himself, is witty, zany, and clever. With a running time of 25 to 30 minutes, the script allows for plenty of work/play and discussion with the audience. Several thought questions, notes on Moliere and medicine in his time, and a bibliography are included with the script. The fast-paced dialogue requires skill and timing for advanced actors. In a play of this type, actors tend to talk too fast and the audience loses much of the storyline. Care should be taken to avoid this.

A set of three boxes/trunks, additive costume pieces, simple props, and six to eight actors make this show ideal for touring. Ninth graders through adults will have a fun and challenging time performing this script for youth from kindergarten through eighth grades.

-- Dianne Breinholt

McDonough, Jerome. Addict. I.E. Clark, 1985. 27 pp. $25.00 per performance.

Addict is a "get tough" play about drug addiction in adolescents and young adults. It gives a very grave, and sometimes gruesome, picture of how youths become involved in drugs and what happens to the less fortunate addicts.

There are ten different characters, each with their own story on how they got involved in drugs. Some of the characters become involved through peer pressure, some by trying to please parents and teachers, others just for the thrill, etc. All die by the end of their story and the autopsy reports are read at the end of the play.

This is not a play for young children. These are not nice stories and there is not one happy ending. Addict is trying to get to kids before drugs get to them. It is a timely and important subject and I applaud Jerome McDonough for using his skills as a playwright to address this matter. I would like to have seen the play written with real cases, real people, and real results, though. I think the impact would have been greater had the play been taken from existing files. The characters were, just that, characters, and it would take very skilled actors, and a skilled and sensitive director to pull this play off without appearing melodramatic. It would be easy to overstate the situations where they could become laughable. For this reason I suggest that high school students not perform this play. I also feel that death is too easy for a consequence. Teenagers are not always as fearful of death as they are of becoming physically or mentally handicapped. McDonough could have shown some of the characters ending up in mental institutions, prisons, or even in a wheelchair, along with showing that some do die.
Jerome McDonough asks, in the notes, that drug counselors be present and that listings of drug centers be printed on the program. He did not intend this play to be entertainment, but for information. It is such an important subject needing this kind of attention that I would hate to see it overdone and lose the intended impact.

-- Erin Caldwell


Playbooks are priced at $1.25 per copy; music scores are $1.75 per copy. 39 pp.

This play deals with inter-generational relationships, death, and a mix of urban and rural cultures. Exclusive boarding school student William Henry Hall comes to visit his cousin Ally, his Aunt Ida, and his grandfather Edsel Greenway. They live in a small rural community, much isolated from contemporary hustle and bustle. Ally and William Henry (both about age 11) are at first antagonistic, but then become good friends by learning to respect the idiosyncrasies of the other. The grandfather, who loves baseball and is able to handle a lot of baseball trivia, tells about his one "shining moment" when he was able to hit a grand slam home run. This becomes not only the title of the play but the symbol of the anticipated accomplishment of the children who are expected to have at least one "shining moment" in their lives.

One night, William Henry wakes up to see his 89-year-old grandfather in the field outside the house hitting the illusive Haley's Comet into the night sky. The next morning he discovers Grandpa has died.

It is a touching work, replete with many old-time favorites such as, "In the Good ol' Summer Time," "Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie," and "Take Me out to the Ball Game." It could be produced effectively by either adults or children, although potential producers should be aware of a cigar smoking scene by the two children.

-- Harold Oaks