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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews

Dubay, Brenda Joyce. *Beauty and the Beast.*

In this tale of *Beauty and the Beast,* Brenda Dubay has reversed the gender of the Beast and the Beauty: Beauty is a young man and the Beast is a woman. While it seems odd to our programmed sex-typed ears to hear a man addressed as Beauty, the reversal does work. The rest of the play follows the fairy tale with Beauty’s siblings being quarrelsome and lazy, and the father stopping at the enchanted castle where he picks the Beast’s flower. The Beast then demands that the father send one of his children to the Beast’s castle or forfeit his life. Beauty volunteers to go and eventually learns to love the Beast.

It is in characterization and theme that this version seems a little heavy handed. Beauty’s dialogue is overly good and sweet and we find ourselves sympathizing with his siblings. We are practically hit over the head with the theme that beauty comes from within. However, Beauty during the course of the play, does become more fun-loving and his siblings become more responsible.

In this tale we are told that the Beast had been proud and vain, and therefore was transformed into a beast by a fairy. In the original tale the Beast had been changed by an evil fairy, and we are left with a feeling of mystery and enchantment as to why this spell had occurred. However, children probably would be intrigued by the role change in this tale and there are many charming and appealing moments.

*Beauty and the Beast* would perform well with adults for children, or with children themselves. It would play best for elementary-school-age children.

—Gayanne Ramsden

Dubay, Brenda Joyce. *Rumpelstiltskin.*

In adapting a story as well-known as this one, each author must find a new way of retelling the tale to make it fresh. Otherwise, why do it? There are plenty of good adaptations of "Rumpelstiltskin" around in publishers’ catalogs. This version does flesh out some of the roles in the original story with plausible action and dialogue. The adaptation is fairly straightforward, but with enough invention to make it enjoyable. The piece is full of tongue-in-cheek witticisms; however, they do not burden the play.
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I think this version of Rumpelstiltskin is oriented toward a family audience. Children in elementary grades will be fascinated by broad, comic characters and the delightful situations that they find themselves in. Older children, as well as adults, will enjoy the off-handed wit of the dialogue and the fast pace of the storyline.

The unexpected twist of familiar association that is revealed near the ending between Rumpelstiltskin and the Miller’s Daughter is a wonderful testament to dramatic inventiveness and a deserved acknowledgment to the joy of childhood and the need to remember our childhood as we grow older. It turns out that Rumpelstiltskin used to be the "imaginary friend" of the Miller’s daughter—he babysat her, tended her, and cared for her as a child. And it goes farther than that—it infers that Rumpelstiltskin has been the "I.F." to the children of the Miller’s Daughters’ family for many past generations. Wonderful twist.

I do feel that the conflicts and resolutions could be stronger. Much of the play seems to happen too easily, but then, it is a fairytale. There is no great hidden meaning to this piece. It is simply an enjoyable evening in the theater. It is even a worthwhile way to spend an hour reading a favorite story.

Only one question or problem with the structure: When the baby is born, does William let Mary Ann off the hook too easily about Rumpelstiltskin and their involvement together? In a piece such as this, does it matter?

—Mike Perry


A 7-Adult

This play takes place in a neighborhood community center of a large city. Five teenage girls from various walks of life are waiting for the counselor, Mrs. Chapman, to arrive. Each girl is pregnant and as the play progresses, each one’s story is told. The girls interact with each other and relationships develop. The characters are so well-written that we really empathize with each one. Problems are discussed such as abortion vs. adoption vs. keeping the baby. The consequences of pre-marital sex and the responsibilities of the boys are also touched upon. Towards the end of the play, it is discovered that one of the girls, Lisa, is not pregnant and is just there doing research for an article for her school newspaper. At first, the other girls feel betrayed, but Lisa explains that after listening to them she has changed her mind and is not going to write the article. After some thought, the other girls decide that their story needs to be told and they encourage her to write the article.
Originally produced for television as a CBS Schoolbreak Special, this play has won numerous awards. Every junior high and high school student should see this. Ninth grade girls through high school seniors would find this script challenging and satisfying. There are also two males in the play: one, a teenager and the other, an older man. The setting can be simple with just the props to suggest the various art projects mentioned in the script, or a full set could be utilized. Touring would be simple.

—Dianne Breinholt

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As this play opens we (the audience) are in a high school auditorium watching T. J. Toeffler, a high school junior, show his photo essay to the class. In the audience with us is Mrs. Pascal, the unseen teacher. T. J. is obviously late and is trying to be funny about it, but is coming across as flippant. He shows us his series of slides which are of his family and friends, but mainly scenes in his home. Of course they have no meaning to us and our reaction is, "so what." At this point T. J. becomes a little more serious and goes through the presentation one more time—this time the explanation of why he took each slide becomes clear as the characters involved act out the scene. As he does this, we realize that they tell the story of his mother’s leaving them and how her leaving affected him and the rest of his family. It also explains why he has been behaving the way he has toward school, his friends, and his teachers. T. J. tried to talk to members of his family, his best friend, his girl friend, and even Mrs. Pascal, but no one wanted to listen.

I have seen two performances of this play and was moved deeply by each one. I not only identified with T. J. but also with Mrs. Pascal, the teacher. I wondered how many times students or people in general need to talk and no one has the time to listen. This play also shows the devastating effects that a mother’s leaving can have on her family, and the struggle she has making that decision.

This one-act play adapts well for touring. The costume and set pieces are minimal. In fact, it is suggested that most of them be mimed. Careful attention must be paid to see that the set pieces match or come close to the slides taken. I have seen T. J. played both as male and female and either way works well. High school students could perform this play for grades 5 through adult. It is short, but this message is "candidly" clear.

—Dianne Breinholt