Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


Reviewed by Harold Oaks

Left by his fellow bats to hang on the front porch by himself, a little brown bat decides to view the world in the daylight instead of the dark. Listening to the mockingbird's self-assured artistic song, the bat discovers the magic and music of poetry. The bat finds that although he cannot make the same sounds as the mockingbird, he can paint pictures with words. After writing his poetry, the bat poet wants to share it with someone else. He learns that each person reacts to poetry in a different way.

Britto's adaptation is true to the imaginative story and poetry written by Randall Jarrell. Music, performed by guitar and flute, is effectively used, mostly as background or for sound effects. Through an interesting story about animals, children are introduced to some basic elements of poetry.

Staging and costuming are to be simple, making the show easy to tour with. The play requires six players, four of whom are double or triple cast, plus two musicians. This would be an excellent play to present to elementary school audiences.

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Reviewed by Kim Dudley

The purpose of the "New Play Classics," under the general editorship of Jonathan Levy, is to make available to producing organizations (schools as well as youth, community, and professional theatres) older plays for young audiences. *Dumb Andy* is one of this series; originally published in Ireland in 1827 as the second of Maria Edgeworth's three *Little Plays*, written to be performed by and for the large Edgeworth family. Maria Edgeworth was a friend of Jane Austen and shared her ear for provincial speech and manners.
Andy, an orphan, is persuaded to pretend he is deaf and dumb to gain favor with the rich. He is in a moral dilemma because he feels this "imposter" position is morally wrong, but he does not want to betray the people who have befriended and raised him since the death of his mother.

The play has many themes and teaches numerous lessons, but it focuses on the poverty and social disruption in Ireland during the early nineteenth century. The characters are believable and not melodramatic, but both they and the storyline could be further developed.

Ten performers are necessary for this production. The director would need to research the history of the period to use the music, character, and plot to the fullest extent. Even though this play is a nice diversion from contemporary problems, it still deals with a basic moral dilemma of the kind young people face today.


B+ 7-12, family audiences Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

Set in the town of Diganlittledeeper during the gold rush days of California, this melodrama tells how Olympia Klenz of the Tub and Scrub Laundry made a fortune washing miners' laundry, only to be swindled out of it by the villain Phineas Flatworm. However, Sheriff Jack B. Nimble comes to the rescue, and with the help of his true love, Sweet Sally, and Olympia's twin sister, Ophelia, the villain is apprehended, justice prevails, and Sheriff Nimble finally gets the courage to propose to Sweet Sally.

This melodrama, which includes a "laundry fight" that ends with the capture of the villain, would be fun for a secondary school group or a community theatre group to produce.


B Pre-2 Reviewed by Kim Dudley

Winston, a wild African lion, is captured and sold to an English circus. Unhappy in captivity, he tries to escape, but he ends up being sent to a zoo.
Eventually, with the help of a young girl, Lee Ho, he escapes from the zoo in an action-filled series of events.

Young children would love this production because it allows vivid imaginations full reign. The play is lively and would entertain preschoolers through second graders. An imaginative director could make this production worthwhile.

Characters can be doubled to condense the twenty-five person cast to seven. Costumes and set may be successful if done creatively.


**B+ 9-12**

Reviewed by Shiela Heindel

The action in this play begins with typical high school events: talk of test scores, dating, restrictions and sports. Throughout the play, few clues are given—we see a girl sleeping in class, a girl who was once bubbly but is now quiet and withdrawn. As the play develops, we discover Tonya has been raped, but no one notices until she tries suicide. Brenda is found dead, the victim of an abusive father. At the end of the play, everyone reaches out to Tonya.

The action allows for free interpretation and is dancelike. Players assume different roles. There is an improvisational quality, like a dramatized essay. Scenery is minimal. Dialogue, the main vehicle for the flow of the plot, is quick and forceful.

My reaction was emotional; I cried because I related. The success of this play would depend on a strong, informed director, because little interaction or character development is written into the script. The play would have the most impact with a teenage ensemble playing to an audience of teenagers, parents, and teachers in a high school community.


**A 3-6**

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

The story of Cinderella as she is known in China, Russia and by Native Americans. Told by Cinderella herself, in person. The packet contains three plays and a framework which can be performed together or independently, as well as a multicultural study guide.
The Swortzells’ well-written volume includes a preface that gives a brief overview and a history of fairy tales. The preface emphasizes that versions of Cinderella are found throughout the world. It also includes a list of suggested readings for those who want to explore further the history of fairy tales. The second section of the book presents Chinese, Russian, and native American versions of Cinderella, set in a framework of the Perrault version. At the end of the book, a multicultural study guide by Nancy Swortzell provides the teacher with a series of drama activities that allow students to explore each of the versions of Cinderella in Lowell Swortzell’s scripts. The activities are explained fully and include background information as well as specific questions and suggestions for developing the creative drama sessions.

Cinderella introduces the show and acts as a bridge to connect the other versions of the story as she narrates her way through the familiar Perrault story.

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The Chinese Cinderella, Pear Blossom, has a wicked stepmother, but only one stepsister. They leave Pear Blossom, whom they call Little Pigling, to do an impossible amount of housework while they go to see the Royal Procession. Pear Blossom’s animal friends aid her in accomplishing the household tasks, and she is able to go see the Royal Procession, where she literally runs into the rich, handsome, wife-seeking Lin Yun. Immediately struck with her beauty, he proposes marriage and offers her a pair of red shoes as a sign of his love. They are wed and live happily ever after.

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Vasilisa, the Russian Cinderella, is left with a wicked stepmother and two ugly stepsisters when her father goes on a trip. The girl’s mother left her a doll, which Vasilisa has promised to keep always. With the help of her magical doll, Vasilisa accomplishes an impossible set of household tasks her stepmother has given her to work her to exhaustion, so the stepmother vows to get rid of the beautiful girl in another way. She sends Vasilisa into the dark night to obtain a candle from Baba Yaga, a fierce witch who lives in the forest and eats unsuspecting children who wander by her cottage. With the help of her doll, Vasilisa escapes Baba Yaga and weds the Tsar. Because of Vasilisa’s true love for her mother, father, and doll, Baba Yaga is rendered helpless.

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Broken Wing, the Native American Cinderella, also has a father who is gone much of the time. Her two sisters (not stepsisters), Blue Fox and Grey Seal, journey to the tepee of the Invisible Hunter, who serves as the prince in...
this version of the story. The hunter is invisible to all but the woman he is to marry. Morning Star, his sister, gives each maiden who comes to the tepee the opportunity to tell her what the invisible hunter looks like. Blue Fox and Grey Seal prepare themselves and go to take this test. Their father insists that Broken Wing follow after them and take the test also. She, of course, is able to see what no other woman has seen—that the invisible hunter is a celestial being with a sled string made of a rainbow and a bow string made of the Milky Way. Broken Wing is given the name Queen of the Starry Night by her husband and goes to rule the skies with him.

A minimum of ten actors (with doubling) is required to perform the three plays. No elaborate scenery is required, and the costumes should be simple and appropriate to each version of the story. The play could easily be designed to tour. The three individual plays are also available from the publisher.

Upper elementary students and family audiences would enjoy this educational and entertaining theatre piece.

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