Play Reviews

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Play Reviews


B+ Family

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

Welburn's Mercantile is the setting for the rise and demise of Ebeneezer Weed and his flunky, Alpheus Witt. Weed and Witt purchase the store from retiring owner Marmaduke Welburn and attempt to take in the town's money and replace it with counterfeit money. They are foiled by Mr. Welburn and Federal Marshal Cooke. Of course there is the heroine, Sybil Bliss, who works at the Mercantile to earn money to save her mother from the dreaded disease of "chronic crow's feet," and her hero Samuel Beauchamp, who, in true form, rescues Sybil from the clutches of Weed.

This would be a fun community theatre production. It might also work well as a high school drama class project.

A list of properties, stage design, and suggestions for obtaining appropriate music are contained in the script. A cast of six males and eight females are required for the production.


A- 4-6

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

Wilma's older brother, Harry, is an incorrigible tease whose mission in life is to make Wilma and her friends miserable—or so it appears. Harry ties Wilma to a tree, throws her toothbrush in the toilet, puts fake worms in her cereal and a lizard in her milk carton, and lets the air out of her bicycle tires.

Wilma and her two friends, Tracy and Renee, vow to get revenge. Simply ignoring Harry and his friend Jake doesn't work. Harry is always bragging about what a good ball player he is, so Renee, the best player on the junior varsity team, challenges him to a game of softball. She wins, and Harry is humiliated in front of the three girls and his best friend. He starts to cry;
Wilma feels bad and tries to comfort him. He is soon back to his incorrigible self, but Wilma still has the last laugh.

Many ten-and eleven-year-old girls would probably identify with Wilma, her experiences with her teasing big brother, and the conversations she and her friends have while plotting their revenge. This play would work very well as a school production. The set and costuming requirements are not demanding. At least four female and three male actors are needed.


Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

The *H.M.S. Pinafore* sails again, this time in a simplified version that would serve as an excellent introduction to opera for grades six through twelve. Gilbert & Sullivan’s story of babies switched at birth and the ludicrous rules of proper, hierarchical English society has been adapted well.

The score is simplified but true to the original music, and it is well within the range of the average voice. The cast consists of six male and seven female actors, and as many extra sailors, sisters, cousins, and aunts as desired. Prop requirements and simple costume suggestions are included in the libretto.

This would be fun for high school students to perform for family or upper elementary school audiences.


Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

The love story of Nanki Poo and Yum Yum lives again in this simplified version of the Gilbert and Sullivan classic. Nanki Poo, the son of the Mikado, disguised as a wandering minstrel, seeks to marry Yum Yum, who is already promised to Ko Ko, the Lord High Executioner. Nanki Poo ultimately does marry Yum Yum, but his true identity is revealed by Katisha, who was engaged to him. In order to avoid being beheaded, Ko Ko persuades Katisha to marry him and everyone lives happily ever after.

This adaptation of the *Mikado* preserves the dry, political humor of the Gilbert and Sullivan original. It would be a good introduction to opera for
upper elementary and high school age children. The music, though simplified, is true to the original score’s style and flavor.

The script includes suggestions for a simple one-set stage as well as a prop list. Stage design could be as elaborate or simple as desired.

The play could be performed by high school students, community theatre groups, or professionals. Thirteen actors and various lords, ladies, and soldiers are required for the cast.


**A 6-Adult**

Toad rides again! The story of Toad’s misadventures with his boat, cart, motorcar, jail sentence, and the rescue of Toad Hall from the Weasels is retold in a lively and entertaining way in this adaptation of Kenneth Grahame’s book.

The music and lyrics blend well with the script and carry it along. The tunes are written in a middle range, so they can be easily sung by a person with an average voice. Production notes suggest simple staging ideas that would make the show easy to produce with a low-budget community theatre group.

Family audiences would enjoy this production. It could be played by high school students as well as professional actors. Fourteen actors plus a number of Riverbankers and Weasels are required. The size of the cast would make the practicality of touring questionable.


**B+ K-2**

Part of the history of Beatrix Potter has been used as a framework to tell her story of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit.* We are introduced to thirteen-year-old Beatrix; her brother, Bertram; her governess, Miss Hammond; and her father. We discover Beatrix’s talent for drawing animals and flowers, her vivid imagination, and her penchant for making up stories, all in the opening scene of the play. We are also introduced to the real Peter Rabbit, a pet rabbit that Beatrix keeps in a cage in her nursery.
Bertram is sent away to school and Beatrix’s letters to him contain stories she has created, including that of Peter Rabbit. This is not historically accurate, but it serves the purposes of the play. As Beatrix begins to write the story of Peter Rabbit to her brother, she takes on the character of Peter, and the other actors—Bertram, Miss Hammond, her father, and three street children—become the other characters in the story.

The script is written in simple, often rhyming prose that appeals to young children. It includes the story of how Peter lost and recovered his jacket and shoes from Mr. McGregor’s garden.

Seven actors, four women and three men, are required for the play. Set and costuming requirements are simple, so the show could easily tour. Children in kindergarten through second grade would be delighted with this tale.


Reviewed by Shiela E. Heindel & Harold R. Oaks

It is Christmas Eve at the Cross-stitch Ranch on the Kansas prairie. Colonel Sam Rushmore is giving a party for orphan children. At the party he plans to announce that he will give the orphanage some "worthless bottom land." We later discover that the railroad plans to use this land. Philip Phlimphlam’s offer to buy the land is refused, and he takes desperate steps to kill the Colonel. Silverado Sterling foils Phlimphlam’s plans and wins the hand of Carol Christmas from the villain Philimphlam.

This is a delightful Christmas melodrama. It would serve as light entertainment for a party or program for either children or their parents. Characters are stock but well drawn, and the situations allow for the creation of a entertaining piece. Props and scenery are suggested in the back of the script and are simple enough for easy production.


Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Young Klaus is apprentice to the powerful Sorcerer. Three "Magics" are always at the Sorcerer’s command to make his spells work as they should.
Klaus, who is somewhat lazy, seeks magic help to do his chores at the urging of the Sorcerer's cat, and he is saved from drowning by the intervention of the Sorcerer. But the boy is curious and asks questions that release a spell on the cat, allowing the cat to help Klaus learn the magic in the Sorcerer's seven books. Klaus discovers that the Sorcerer is seeking power to control the village and to force the villagers to obey him. Klaus uses the magic for good, first to overcome the evil magic of the Sorcerer, then to convince the Sorcerer to relearn the good magic so he may help rather than harm people.

This version of the classic story was written for adults to perform for child audiences, but it could be performed by young people, too. The cat and the three "Magics" that actually perform the bidding of those who control them are useful and interesting theatrical elements. Staging may be either elaborate or simple. The play could also be used for some very interesting discussions about the uses of power in our world.


Reviewed by Michael Harlow & Harold R. Oaks

Fourteen-year-old Lexie is having problems at home and at school. While being taunted by her friends, she falls and hits her head. In this unconscious state she is required to go on a journey to find "Serendiperi." Her trip takes her through the land of lost and found, opposite land, the land of herself (where she sees herself as she is, as she will be, and as she can be), and the land of childhood past, all peopled with storybook characters. Lexie is finally able to find her own "Serendiperi," or inner strength and peace.

The script is intended to be used as an outline in building a full production using up to fifty young people through improvisation. In several places additional characters can be added and the creative efforts of the group can be used. Sets and costumes can be simple or elaborate, depending on what is available. This play would be an excellent project for an upper elementary or middle school class or classes. It creatively explores solutions to common problems young people face, and it ends with a very positive message.


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A K-6, Family Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

The Pinocchio story used in this adaptation is based on the original Collodi tale written in 1883. It begins with the carving of the puppet from a pine log and ends with the puppet being changed to a real boy because he selflessly saves his "Father," Gepetto. The story is told by a troupe of five Commedia players who assume the various roles required. The transitions are smooth, and clever asides and theatrical action advance the story.

Young people who see this version would gain an understanding of the original "morals" (listening to wise voices, heeding advice, not trusting everyone who tells of easy pleasures without work, etc.), but with the Commedia approach, they are also exposed to a great Italian theatrical tradition. Settings are minimal, costumes are suggested, masks are useful for character change but are not required, and props are intended to look "homemade" by the players.

High school or adult players would probably do best for this multiple-character work, and they could best play for elementary age or family audiences. A free study guide is available from the publisher.

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