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**Play Reviews**

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Play Reviews


B- K-4 Reviewed by Rachel Young

The Raggle-Taggle Players, at least some of them, come to a school to perform. After reviewing their assets and the scripts available, they decide to perform their "spoof" version of Little Red Riding Hood. In this version the Wolf heads a gang, and the Grandmother turns into "Super Granny" to save the day. It is discovered that the Wolf cannot read, and Little Red Riding Hood offers to teach him. All ends happily in the end.

This is an audience participation work, requiring frequent participation of various audience members to move the action forward. It is slow setting up the narration to start the performance. The treatment of the "gang" is light—not fitting the problems often encountered with gangs in and around schools today. The character of "Super Granny" seems a bit contrived and corny. The morals of the story are appropriate, but there are too many for such a short work. The script might be best used as a classroom project on improvisation for upper elementary, middle school or junior high students.


B+ 6-9 Reviewed by Mary Randak

Roxanne, a fourteen-year-old whose parents are divorced, is getting ready to sing a rock song in a school recital. Her mother is very supportive, but Roxanne’s self-esteem is low, and she is sure she will fail. Her alter egos are the stars of a television series about rock singers called "Rockway Cafe." She interacts with them and enters the television world to learn some lessons about growing up and what it takes to do what you really want to do. By the end of the play, Roxanne has overcome her isolation and self-pity enough to go to the school dance with a date.
Rockway Cafe' imaginatively and perceptively deals with the problem of self-image. It dramatizes the television world on the stage alongside the everyday world of Roxanne's living room and includes musicians and singers on stage at the same time. This would certainly be most teenagers' dream world come to life.

The actual working out of the story seems a little rough, however, and the solution a little too easy. Roxanne and her mother are fully developed, but I missed something in Roxanne's interactions with the television characters. I wasn't able to hear the songs, which are a major part of their communication, however, and I'm sure that this would make a difference. Nevertheless, the play feels a bit skimpy to me. Junior high or high school students would have fun producing it because of the music and the challenges of creating the television world on stage.


B+ 3-6

Reviewed by Donna Moore

Rosebud is afraid to risk change and to bloom. The Crazy Daisy Twins and several other meadow characters try to convince her to stretch and bloom, but without success. Some children pass by, talking about finding and making friends and being different from others, and Rosebud recognizes these problems as her own. Rosebud reaches out to make friends with the Daisy Twins and finds herself opening up to bloom as a beautiful flower.

This is a delightful musical fantasy with entertaining roles that offer room for personal expression. It could be performed by middle school, junior high, or high school students for elementary children. Children should be attracted to the 1950s style guitar music used to accompany the songs. The work is intended for the underachiever and for the shy, a population often neglected, but it speaks to all children who face change and may find the task of discovering themselves a challenge. Very theatrical staging with minimal technical requirements.

B+   K-3

Reviewed by Rachel Young

Friendly Sally coaxes her neighbor, grumpy Jasper, into sharing her birthday dessert: a gingerbread boy cookie. Children from the audience help put the ingredients together. Sally names the cookie Jiminy Jeepers, but while she goes to get a card to write down the recipe, he comes to life! When Jasper tries to eat him, Jiminy runs away singing a song. He encounters many obstacles along his way and meets many interesting characters, including a cow, a horse, and a fox. Although the animals all start out kind, they the animals cannot help but crave Jiminy and they all try to catch him. He escapes and is finally saved by Jasper, who hires him as Sally’s doorman.

This is a delightful adaptation of the old gingerbread boy adventure, with songs and audience participation. Each character adds dimension and humor. The dialogue works quite well, but the lyrics are sometimes complicated and jumbled. Only the familiar, catchy chant of the gingerbread boy seems to capture the spirit of the play. However, the tale is well developed, and the characters should be interesting to younger children.


A-   6-12

Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

The story loosely parallels Edmond Rostands’ classic play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Cyril Knowles, an "A" student, talented musician, and unassuming person, dreams of dating the most beautiful girl in the school, Elaine Alexander. He even composes a song for her. She is the girlfriend of Andy Carlson, star athlete, and she and her crowd of friends see Cyril as a nerd—all brains and no socially redeeming qualities.

Cyril’s chance to impress Elaine comes when his friend Dennis learns that her boyfriend, Andy, a wealthy, partying star athlete, needs help to bring up his grades so he can stay on the team. When Andy learns that Cyril composes music, he also wants Cyril to help him write an original song for the school talent show. The problem is that Andy won’t let anybody tell Elaine that Cyril is helping him. Through their work together, Andy and Cyril discover they have a lot in common. However, Andy takes full credit for writing the song and tells Elaine he’s dedicating it to her at the talent show. One afternoon, Elaine even finds Andy at Cyril’s house and wants to know what’s going on.
Instead of telling the truth, Andy lies. This makes Cyril angry, but he does nothing. That evening, after a keg party with some of his teammates, Andy is killed in a drunken driving accident. To honor Andy, his friends ask Cyril to sing the song at the talent show. Dennis tells them that Cyril and Andy wrote the song together. Elaine tells the student body who the real composer is when she introduces Cyril and the song at the talent show.

The play is well written and deals effectively with several issues—cliques, stereotyping, peer pressure, and accepting others for who and what they are. An optional scene provides the opportunity for each character to tell how he or she feels about Andy's death and to send a powerful, indirect message against drinking and driving.

Music was unavailable for review, but the lyrics for the two songs included in the script enhance the message of the play. Set demands are minimal, and the show could easily tour. The play would be most effective performed by teens for other teens and family audiences.


B+ K-5 Reviewed by Donna Moore

This is another in the series of Commedia adaptations of famous tales, complete with Columbine, Arlequin, Punchin, and Rosetta. These four characters play all the roles in the story, taking time at the beginning of the play to set up the action and appropriate roles for everyone. The adaptation adds a comic dimension to the story, complete with a Christmas Ball, a wacky fairy godmother, simpleton stepsisters (Dither & Simper), and the conniving stepmother. It ends with Cinderella escaping the kitchen, marrying the Prince, and living happily ever after.

The antics and dialogue of the performers should hold the attention of young audiences. The play uses a narrator to bridge scenes and describe actions mimed by some of the players. Resolution of the play takes longer than necessary. Costumes and properties all come from the players' "Caravan," a chest on wheels brought on by the players. Staging is simple and imaginative.

Reviewed by Donna Moore

This Commedia adaptation of Puss-N-Boots features Columbine, Arlequin, Punchin, Scaramouch, Pantalone, and Rosetta (4 men; 2 women), who play all the roles in the story. The youngest son of a poor miller inherits his father’s cat, Puss-N-Boots. This ingenious cat brings his new master great prosperity, a kingdom of his own, and a beautiful princess. This is an interesting and entertaining adaptation of the classical tale, easily played by performers who have been trained in improvisation and who enjoy having fun with the material, each other, and the audience.

Costumes and properties all come from the players’ "Caravan," a chest on wheels brought on by the players. Staging is simple and imaginative, and the show is easily toured.


Reviewed by Donna Moore

One Christmas Eve two children sit gazing out their window, feeling sad because they have so few material things. A fairy appears and tells them they already have the important things in life, but they still cannot see this. So the fairy sends them on a journey to find a "bluebird," which is reality is "happiness." As a guide she gives them "LIGHT" (a symbol of truth and peace), a magic ring, and their dog and cat.

The journey begins in the "LAND OF MEMORY," where the children visit their deceased grandparents. Next they find the "PALACE OF NIGHT," which is filled with locked, secret doors. Behind the doors lurk ghosts, sicknesses, wars, terrors, and mysteries. They continue on their search and enter the "PLACE OF JOY AND HAPPINESS," which contains the "LAP OF LUXURY," where everyone indulges but no one is truly happy. Characters who represent the "TRUE HAPPINESS" enter and teach the children the worth of loving parents, kindness, being well and strong, beautiful music, and springtime. Finally they enter "THE KINGDOM OF THE FUTURE," where children are waiting their turn to come to earth. They are busy developing their talents to bring to the earth. The searchers awaken, as if from a dream, to find the "BLUEBIRD" in a cage in their room. It has been there all the time.
This is a new musical fantasy based on the play of the same name by Maurice Maeterlinck. It is an excellent musical for elementary schools and for community theaters that want to produce plays that require child actors. The script requires a minimum of twenty performers, but a creative director could involve many more children. There are lots of exciting possibilities for this show. It could be quite an expensive undertaking, since multiple sets are required. Use of music is extensive and could also require extra time, but it is lively and performers should enjoy learning it. The script comes with a property list and production notes. A fixed facility is recommended for this show.


A 2-6 and Family Reviewed by Harold R. Oaks

Mary Hall Surface has charmingly and imaginatively adapted Kenneth Grahame's story. She has retained the character and color of the original in making it a very performable work. This script, commissioned by the Kennedy Center Theatre for Young People and the Seattle Children's Theatre, has been given several professional productions, and the smooth theatrical transitions are evident. Characters are well developed, the language is colorful, and the staging is workable.

Themes of the production, beyond the telling of a delightful story, include resolving conflicts without violence and withholding judgment about others when you don't know them. But these are things we come to understand through the characters and situation, not by being told.


B+ K-4 Reviewed by Rosemarie Howard

Rufo, a proud and lazy cat, has no friends until he learns that it is just as important to work hard as it is to play hard. Two narrators work together to tell the story in both English and Spanish. The cast includes ten other members, including a hen and her chickens, a butterfly, a mouse, the sun, and a walrus.
Music is integral to the play, but there is no prescribed score—just a few suggestions in the script. Masks are used to indicate the different animal characters.

The concept of using two languages to tell a story works very well in this script. It would provide an introduction to Spanish or English for young children and help them learn a few words of the other language. The play should be performed by adults for a child audience.

The quality of the format of the printed script is inconsistent with most other scripts published by this company. It is hard to read because it is printed as one continuous page of print. There are also a couple of typos in the Spanish words.

★★★★