Theatre Festivals for Young Audiences

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Over the past several years we of The Children’s Book and Play Review have reviewed hundreds of plays published in the United States and abroad. But the play script is only an outline for the artistic work—like the score of a musical work. It is not complete in itself—but is intended to be performed if it is to come to life.

In a previous article (“Theatre for Young Audiences in the United States,” CBPR 15:2), I discussed professional companies that perform for young audiences. Over ninety companies in the United States now do regular work for young people. They are located in most major metropolitan areas, and over half of them tour extensively, regionally and nationally. I encourage you to find companies in your area and attend regularly.

Besides going to the playhouse, how else can one see quality theatre performances for young audiences? An exciting field in drama and theatre is the many theatre festivals in selected regions of the United States and Canada. Along with theatre performances, festivals usually include music and dance groups, solo performers, clowns, and mimes, and range over several days. Festivals provide several events that are either free to the public or are included in the general price of attending the general event. Scripted theatrical performances usually require additional tickets. Popular shows tend to sell out quickly, even several weeks before the festival begins if they are known to do excellent work. A festival is an excellent way to become familiar with a range of performing groups in a short time and to see some of the best work from other areas and countries. These events can be excellent vacations for families, memorable field trips for school groups, and enriching experiences for theatre professionals.

Listed below are some of the regular festivals in the United States and Canada, with contact phone/FAX numbers. Each of these organizations presents a regular festival, but the exact dates will vary. I suggest contacting them directly for current dates, ticket costs, companies, and housing possibilities. Plan early to be sure you are able to see the performances you are most interested in.

UNITED STATES FESTIVALS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE


Pittsburgh Children’s Festival: Held mid-May each year (May 13-17, 1998). Contact: Maranne P. Welch, 134 Allegheny Center Mall, Pittsburgh, PA 15212-5334. Tel: (412) 321-5520; FAX: (412) 321-5212.

Seattle International Children’s Festival: Held the second week in May each year (May 11-16, 1998). Contact: Festival Director, Seattle International Children’s Festival, Seattle Center, 305 Harrison, Seattle, WA 98109. Tel: (206) 684-7335; FAX: (206)233-3944.

International Children’s Festival: Held in Tampa, Florida. Biennial (no 1998 Festival; next will be March 1999). Contact: Jerry Bickel, Bits ‘N Pieces Puppet Theatre, POB 368, Tampa, FL 33601. Tel: (813) 659-0659; FAX: (813) 659-3902.
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CANADIAN FESTIVALS
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Ottawa-Hull Children’s Festival: Held in June each year. Ottawa, Ontario-Hull, Quebec. Contact: Nancy Turner, Director. Tel: (613) 728-7863; FAX: (613) 728-5547.

London International Children’s Festival: Held mid-June each year. London, Ontario. Contact: Pat Finch, Director. Tel: (519) 645-6739; FAX: (519) 645-7245.

Northern Saskatchewan International Children’s Festival: Held early June each year. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan—takes place in a park on the banks of the Saskatchewan river in specially designed theatre tents. Contact: Cass Cozens/Joan Flood. Tel: (306) 664-3378; FAX: (306) 664-2344.

Regina International Children’s Festival: Held mid-June each year. Regina, Saskatchewan—takes place on the campus of the University of Regina. Contact: Christa Dodaldson. Tel: (306) 352-7655; FAX: (306) 525-6947.

Calgary International Children’s Festival: Held in May each year. Calgary, Alberta—takes place at the Calgary Center for the Performing Arts in the heart of downtown Calgary and in the adjoining Olympic Plaza. Contact: Joanne James. Tel: (403) 294-7414; FAX: (403) 294-7457.

Canadian Northern Children’s Festival: Held in May each year. Prince George, British Columbia—takes place outdoors in specially designed tent theatres. Contact: Jo-Ann Merkel. Tel: (604) 562-4882; FAX: (604) 562-6690.

Northern Alberta Children’s Festival: Held in late May each year. Edmonton, Alberta—takes place in downtown Edmonton. Contact: Gail Barrington-Moss. Tel: (403) 459-1693; FAX: (403) 458-5417.

Milk International Children’s Festival: Held in mid-May each year. Toronto, Ontario—takes place in the Harbourfront Center complex in downtown Toronto. Contact: Suzanne Gerhardt. Tel: (416) 973-4231; FAX: (416) 973-8729.

Festival International de Theatre/Jeunes Publics du Quebec: Held biennially in late May to early June. Montreal, Quebec. Contact: Nicole Ducet. Tel: (514) 288-7211; FAX: (514) 288-5724.

Vancouver International Children’s Festival: Held late May each year (May 25-31, 1998). Vancouver, British Columbia—performances take place in specially designed theatre tents, outdoors. Audiences of 50,000+. A seven-day event, featuring approximately 200 performances by twenty companies. Contact: Marjorie MacLean. Tel: (604) 687-7697; FAX: (604) 699-3613.

Winnipeg International Children’s Festival: Held early June each year. Winnipeg, Manitoba—takes place in specially designed tent theaters at “The Forks,” a national historic site. Contact: Gordon Osland. Tel: (204) 958-4730; FAX: (204) 231-8017.

In addition to these various festivals, there are similar festivals in other parts of the world. ASSITEJ INTERNATIONAL (the International Organization of Theatre for Children and Young People) lists festivals in twenty-two countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, Japan, and Korea. Most of these festivals include international companies in addition to groups from the host country. It is an excellent opportunity to sample works from more than one culture or country.