Written by Mike Schulz
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When the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse first produced *Goldilocks & the Three Bears* in 2002, I was a member of the cast, so I'll admit that there weren't many surprises for me in the venue's new production of the family musical. There was one *biggie*, though: Beneath the program credit that read "Adapted for the stage by Justin Gebhardt," I saw my own name listed under "With additional material by ... ."

Huh?!

For the life of me, I couldn't imagine what "additional material" I'd provided. But then I realized that Gebhardt - who directed both *Goldilocks* productions - had cited the entire 2002 cast for our "additional material," perhaps in recognition of the ad libs and improvisations that found their way into this updated version, too. If that's the case, I consider the mention a very kind acknowledgment.

And also, perhaps, a subtle way of shifting the blame.

Circa '21's original *Goldilocks,* while the zenith in silliness, was great fun to perform. Yet no one in the audience appeared to be having as much fun as *we* were, and now that I've actually *seen* the show, the crowds' underwhelmed reactions - both during its original run and its opening-day

presentation - are understandable:
Goldilocks
feels like an inside joke that no one is allowed to be inside
with
.

Story-wise, Gebhardt doesn't deviate from the traditional Goldilocks tale *too* much; there are three beds, three chairs, three bowls of porridge, and all that. But nearly every time the characters burst into song, what they sing isn't the kiddie fare you might expect - it's Broadway show tunes. *Lots* of Broadway show tunes.

The idea of filling a kiddie production with musical-theatre show-stoppers - creating a Baby's First Broadway sort of thing - is actually pretty inspired, and every once in a while, the conceit works well, as when Goldilocks (Hannah Solchenberger), newly arrived at the Bears' house, belts out the *Annie* anthem "I Think I'm Gonna Like It Here." *Annie*, in fact, gets quite a workout; you'll also hear "Maybe" and "Tomorrow," and the production itself is actually subtitled
Little Orphan Goldi: A Magical Musical Adventure
.

But then why isn't this *Annie* subtext acknowledged in the script? (The "Little Orphan Goldi" theme is never referred to; *Annie*'s songs, like all the others in the show, simply *happen*.) Why are there no Miss Hannigan or Daddy Warbucks figures for "Goldi" to play off? Why, instead of continuing this musical theme, does the show have its characters sing The

King & I'
s "I Whistle a Happy Tune,"
Seven Brides for Seven Brothers
' "Wonderful, Wonderful Day," and
Dreamgirls
' "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going"?

For that matter, why are lines of dialogue taken verbatim from *Into the Woods*? Why, when Goldilocks and Baby Bear (Russell Berberich) first meet, is the scene underscored to
West Side Story
's "The Dance at the Gym"? In short, why are these characters so damned show-tune happy? And why isn't the show-tune concept
consistent
? (You'll also hear a couple of songs that, to my ears, have no Broadway forebears whatsoever, plus "It's a Sunshine Day" from
The Brady Bunch
.)

You'll never know. I was in it and *still* couldn't tell you. The musical numbers and Broadway references are baffling because they aren't connected to the plot or characters in any meaningful way, and the concept makes even *less* sense considering its setup, which finds the show's narrators (Alysa Grimes and Kelsey Guard) using "audience volunteers" (Berberich, Brad Hauskins, and Liz Millea) for the bears' roles. Like everything else here, this conceit quickly proves pointless; the "unprepared" trio is quickly reciting from the script without prompts, and within minutes, the "audience volunteer" concept is all but ignored.

In short, this *Goldilocks* - camp played all too straight - is one of the most thoroughly *bizarre* family musicals the venue has produced in more than a decade. The performers attempt to muddle through with dignity intact, but as their characters don't make a lick of sense, their frozen smiles - on opening day, at least - looked a little desperate. (There was a distinct air of "Are we getting
away
with this?") And while I have no doubt that the actors have grown more confident in the two weeks that have passed since my
Goldilocks
viewing, the show's problem clearly isn't the cast; it's the
show
.

The littlest of kids might have fun, but *Goldilocks & the Three Bears* doesn't seem *designed* for kids, particularly, and doesn't seem designed for most adults. It seems geared solely towards theatre majors. And even some of
us
don't get it.

For tickets, call (309) 786-7733 extension 2.