

Written by Thom White
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What happens if you give a mouse a cookie? Nothing good, if you're the cookie giver. If, however, you're watching what unfolds by way of the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse's current youth-theatre offering, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, it's a delightful experience.

Based on the children's book by Laura Joffe Numeroff and adapted for the stage by Jody Davidson, the story follows the antics of an imaginative and mischievous mouse after a boy gives him, of course, a cookie. The sugar rush sets the mouse on a wild ride of dancing, pantomiming a superhero's story, and cutting his own hair, among other things that typical mice do... in storybooks.

Director Kimberly Furness takes a very minimalist approach to her staging, relying on the kitchen set from Circa '21's current mainstage show *Hairspray* as the backdrop, but incorporating clever props of oversized items made to scale for a mouse. There's a giant glass of milk, large scissors, and even a gargantuan rubber kitchen glove, to name a few of the inventive pieces designed to look like illustrations from a children's book. Furness also plays up the slapstick aspects of the story, much to the delight of Saturday's matinée audience. Judging by their roars of laughter, the kids absolutely loved the silliness of the piece. And for the adults,

Feeding Frenzies: "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie," at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse through July 30

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Furness also throws in some pop-culture references, including the bullet-dodging scene from *The Matrix*

,
The Karate Kid's

crane stance, and a familiar line from

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade

("It belongs in a museum!"), as well as more that I likely missed.



Daniel Rairdin-Hale, in bib overalls, a tail, and a cap with rodent ears attached, makes for an adorable mouse with the exuberance of an easily distracted two-year-old. Walking a fine line between annoyance and likability, I consistently wanted to slap Rairdin-Hale's Mouse and hug him at the same time.

Janos Horvath – a crowd-pleaser as the female teacher in Circa '21's previous youth-theatre production, *Alexander & the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* – is the boy who gives the mouse the cookie... and comes to deeply regret it. Horvath, for the most part, plays the character with that amusingly silly, childlike style of overacting typical of adults playing young children. However, every once in a while, he also mixes in just a smidge of adult angst, connecting subtly with the grown-ups in the audience. (My favorite bits were his annoyed looks at the sound-board operator for playing theme music every time Horvath spoke the title of a comic book.)

Jennifer Weingarten, who was fantastically feisty in Circa '21's *All Shook Up* earlier this year and is delightfully dorky in

Hairspray

, is charmingly funny as Mouse's mirror image, for the most part matching his moves until she starts playing tricks on him that are visible only to the audience members (who were tickled by her technique).

As an adult, I was amused by *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, but its slapstick nature is better received by patrons still in their single digits. And that's the part that I enjoyed most about the show: listening to the laughter and watching the excitement of the children seeing the play, who seemed thoroughly entertained by the experience.

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For tickets and information, call (309)786-7733, extension 2, or visit Circa21.com.