

Critter Comforts: “Diary of a Worm, a Spider, & a Fly,” through May 5 at Circa '21

Written by Thom White
Tuesday, 03 April 2012 12:10

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Judging by the children dancing in the aisles during Saturday’s performance, Circa ’21’s current children’s offering *Diary of a Worm, a Spider, & a Fly* is a hit with younger audience members. But the hour-long musical also has quite a few laughs for the adults.

When the kids weren’t laughing at playwright Joan Cushing’s fart jokes or Worm describing his sister as having a “face that looks like her butt,” I was laughing at what I assume are director Kimberly Furness’ additions of pop-culture references. My favorite was Worm and Fly singing along to “Carry on My Wayward Son” after being told to “Please enjoy this music while your party is reached” when they call Spider’s cell phone.

As she did with last year’s Circa ’21 shows *Junie B. Jones in Jingle Bells*, *Batman Smells* and *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, Furness makes sure to entertain everyone in the audience. For the kids, she’s directed her

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actors to play up the childish humor; they over-emphasize their emotions and bounce around the stage with bright, smiling faces as they joke about eating their homework, sing about what they want to be when they grow up, and tease each other in schoolyard fashion. For the adults, there are uproariously funny bits such as Spider’s molting, for which Furness re-creates a classic (but clean) strip show, with Spider placed behind a large leaf and the other actors dancing in front of it, holding flower petals, as Spider tosses his clothing away.

With music, lyrics, and a script by Cushing – who also wrote the books on which the show is based – *Diary* blends the cutesy and immature with an underlying message of being happy with who you are.

The musical begins with a rap number – complete with flashing lights and hip-hop-style dance moves – introducing the audience to Worm (Marc Ciemiewicz), Spider (Brad Hauskins), Fly (Kelly Anna Lohrenz), Bee (Cari Downing), Butterfly (Abby Van Gerpen), and Ant (Joe Maubach). Worm compensates for his lack of legs with humor. Spider is always the first to volunteer in class to talk about himself. Fly dreams of being a superhero, a goal pooh-poohed by the others because she’s a girl.



As Spider, Hauskins brings his usual dry sense of humor, seemingly relishing his character’s childish condescension. Lohrenz’s confident stances mixed with her pouty faces make clear Fly’s internal conflict about her dream. Ciemiewicz, whom I adored last year in Circa’s adult stage show *Nuncrackers* and children’s production *Alexander & the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, is equally pleasing here with his adorably awkward, joke-telling Worm. He has a knack for playing kids, with such sweetness and delight in silly things that it’s easy to have a good time along with him.

In the supporting cast, Downing is as odd as Ciemiewicz but in a different way. Using a Minnesota accent for her teacher Mrs. McBee, she often shouts parts of her lines, such as assigning the kids a report called “*all about me!*” (Ciemiewicz amusingly repeats this out-of-place amplification later in the show.) Maubach accompanies every line delivery with martial-arts moves, delightfully punctuating his words with raised volume at the point of each punch and kick. And Van Gerpen speaks with a sing-song inflection, bouncing around the stage while flapping her wings and often dancing in a Latin style.

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As usual, costume designer Gregory Hiatt impresses with his use of everyday objects to create the characters’ looks. Fly’s wings are ceiling-fan blades, and two sequined disks represent her compound eyes. Spider’s eight legs are created by combining the actor’s four limbs with four attached to an upside-down wooden barrel around his waist. Butterfly’s wings are decorative scarves attached to her back and wrists, flapping as she moves her arms. The most effective touches are Ant’s fake arms attached at the waist and wrists, so that they move in sync with the actor’s real arms.

I couldn’t be more pleased with Circa’s *Diary of a Worm, a Spider, & a Fly*. The production was delightful from beginning to end and pleased both the kid and the adult in me.

Diary of a Worm, a Spider, & a Fly runs through May 5 at the Circa ’21 Dinner Playhouse (1828 Third Avenue in Rock Island). For more information, visit

ca21.com

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