

“Oh the Thinks You Can Think...” A Review of Fine Linen’s “Seussical The Musical”

By Corbin Kottman

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Fine Linen’s most recent production, “Seussical the Musical”, brings the world of Dr. Seuss to life through colorful imagery, choreography and singing, as well as the hard work of the cast and crew. Audience members of any age can find something to enjoy in this show that features a mix of humor and valuable lessons and commentary.

“Seussical” is a treat for the senses as soon as the overture begins to echo from the show’s live band. The curtain falls back, blooming into a pop-up book of a set. The colors and shapes pieced together onstage are so reminiscent of Seuss’ books, you would almost believe the man dropped by the theater to draw them himself. And the actors, both young and old, bring the writer’s stories to life as they fill in the spaces in between.

The show is opened by actors John Nisbett and David Riefer, respectively portraying The Cat in the Hat and his young friend JoJo. From the moment John steps onstage and dons his famous hat, you’re already invested in his character and that of his free-thinking young pal, who delivered an impressive performance, one you maybe wouldn’t expect from one so young. The Cat pops in and out of each scene. The script doesn’t always explain how he’s doing this, but you’re always glad to see him when he shows up.

The audience is then taken to The Jungle of Nool where the rest of the cast introduces themselves before the story begins. We meet the Bird Girls, played by Anna, Clarissa and Joy Nisbett, who serve as narrators and backup singers throughout the show, flaunting twirling skirts instead of feathers while they dance.

They’re joined by other jungle creatures such as the rambunctious Wickersham Brothers, who’s vocal harmonies might not be what you would expect from a team of trouble making monkeys, but prove just as enjoyable as the hijinks they get up to onstage.

The Sour Kangaroo, played by Amy Bell, brings soul and sass to the jungle, belting her solos with impressive control while not forgetting to share the stage with her younger counterpart played by Alessandra Obrist, who dominates her own vocal parts.

Mayzie Labird and Gertrude McFuzz are another set of birds whose characters are direct opposites, but both deliver the same quality performance. Mayzie Labird, played by Lauren Werkmeister, shows off her vocal skills while elegantly highlighting the show’s costume direction, using her vibrant acting to illustrate the feathers her character is so proud of.

Meg Riefer almost steals the show as Gertrude, throwing comedy, and one tantrum, all over the stage. Her acting and facial expressions earn a large collection of laughter from the audience each time she appears.

And Horton, played by Dan Goff, lumbers his way into the audiences' hearts with the way his singing and acting perfectly portrays the loyal, lovable and sometimes shy elephant.

The citizens of Whoville also make their appearance early in the show, led by Mr. and Mrs. Mayor, played by Ron Townley and Angie Pfeifer, who instantly make you root for "the little guy" as their duo act endears you to them and the rest of their colorful constituents.

The rest of the cast is filled with actors of all ages who aren't afraid to get a little silly. Each one stands out on their own as either a jungle creature, citizen of Whoville, or even a circus performer on a unicycle. The cast comes together and shows that not only have they practiced the material, they genuinely enjoy it, and their good time is shared by the audience.

The actors, despite many of them being animals, are costumed in a subtle fashion. Using jewelry and fabric for feathers, and large glasses to give the impression of an elephant's large ears. The costumes focus on a certain time period, giving the show a solid sense of consistency. At first an audience member might wonder how the humanoid citizens of Whoville will look any different, but once they make their appearance they prove how smart the costume designs really are.

The cast utilizes a single set throughout the show, avoiding any scene changes while bringing on a small addition here and there to illustrate a new location. Rather than bringing in a collection of smaller, maybe lackluster pieces, the show focuses on one multifunctional set and blends the worlds of Whoville and The Jungle of Nool together.

What were the steps of the Who's city one scene before, become the hills and cliff of the Jungle the next. When the occasion calls for both places to be represented, the crew cleverly uses lighting and space to show the difference. All of this is given to the audience right at the beginning of the show, showing that the title of one of the later songs, "Anything's Possible," is about to come true.

The dancing that occurs on this set is well choreographed from the front lines all the way to the back. No matter where you choose to look, someone is doing something interesting. The dancing shifts between flashy movements by the bird girls and other ensemble members, such as the "Havin' a Hunch" dancers, to more subtle movements meant to illustrate character or scene design.

The score features almost as many musical callbacks as there are Seuss references, and the live band playing offstage, conducted by Keith Nisbett, played each style enthusiastically.

"Seussical" features valuable messages hidden inside the show, from hearing the voices of the overlooked and thinking outside of the box that has been given to you, to embracing body positivity and loving yourself for who you are. All of this is wrapped up in enjoyable characters whose singing and dancing will make you wish intermission was just a little bit shorter.

All together, "Seussical the Musical" by Fine Linen, will almost certainly leave you craving green eggs and ham.