

BIG FISH THE MUSICAL

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY ANDREW LIPPA

BOOK BY JOHN AUGUST

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY DANIEL WALLACE

PRODUCED BY: FINE LINEN DRAMA

DIRECTED BY KIM NISBETT

REVIEWED ON APRIL 14, 2015 BY JOHN WOODFIN

FINE LINEN DRAMA DOES IT AGAIN

BIG FISH, THE MUSICAL, IS ABOUT STORYTELLING AND NO THEATRE PRODUCTION COMPANY DOES STORYTELLING BETTER THAN FINE LINEN DRAMA.

THIS IS ONE AMAZING TALE AND *FINE LINEN DRAMA* PULLS OUT ALL THE STOPS WHEN THEY RECREATE THIS STORY ON THE CEDAR STREET PLAYHOUSE STAGE, HOME OF THE OZARK ACTORS THEATRE.

BASED ON THE 1998 NOVEL BY DANIEL WALLACE, THIS MUSICAL IS ABOUT EDWARD BLOOM, A 60 YEAR OLD AILING, TRAVELING SALESMAN FROM THE DEEP SOUTH WHO LOVES TO TELL TALL TALES. EDWARD'S SON, WILL, HAS GROWN UP HEARING THESE TALL TALES AND HAS BECOME WEARY OF HIS FATHER'S STORYTELLING AND NO LONGER TRUSTS HIM DUE TO HIS FATHER'S INABILITY TO TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT ANYTHING.

EDWARD AND WILL'S RELATIONSHIP IS STRAINED, LARGELY BECAUSE OF EDWARD'S STRETCHING OF THE TRUTH BUT ALSO BECAUSE HE WAS OFTEN AN ABSENT FATHER DURING HIS SON'S CHILDHOOD DUE TO HIS PROFESSION. WILL FEELS DISCONNECTED FROM HIS FATHER BUT ENDS UP PASSING HIS STORIES ON TO HIS OWN SON AND IN THIS WAY KEEPS HIS FATHER AND HIS STORIES ALIVE.

AS THE LIGHTS COME UP, WE FIND EDWARD NEAR A RIVER SKIPPING STONES WHEN WILL, SOON TO BE MARRIED, ASKS HIS FATHER TO NOT TELL HIS TALL TALES AT THE WEDDING. HIS FATHER IS CONFUSED AND CAN'T UNDERSTAND WILL'S REQUEST AND ENTERS A FLASHBACK TO A TIME WHEN WILL IS JUST A CHILD WHEN EDWARD TOLD HIS SON MANY STORIES FILLED WITH WILD AND FANTASTICAL CHARACTERS

THE PLOT OF THE MUSICAL IS CONVEYED THROUGH A SERIES OF FLASHBACKS AND IN EACH, EDWARD TELLS ONE OF HIS OUTRAGEOUS TALES.

AS EDWARD LIES ON HIS DEATHBED DYING FROM CANCER, WILL FINALLY UNDERSTANDS WHY HIS FATHER TOLD THESE TALES AND RECONCILES HIS FEELINGS ABOUT HIS FATHER AND HIS STORIES. AS WILL LETS HIS ANGER GO, HE ACCEPTS HIS FATHER FOR WHO HE TRULY IS AND IS ABLE TO MEND THIS IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

I DON'T WANT TO GIVE TOO MUCH AWAY, SUFFICE IT TO SAY, FINE LINEN DRAMA DOES A FINE JOB TELLING THIS TALL TALE ABOUT A TELLER OF TALL TALES.

AS ALWAYS, THE PERFORMANCES GIVEN WERE OUTSTANDING. KEITH NISBETT DOES A FINE JOB AS THE ELDER EDWARD BLOOM AND RYAN FARMER DOES EQUALLY WELL AS HIS GROWN SON, WILL. THE REST OF THE CAST ARE OUTSTANDING AS WELL. IN ADDITION TO EDWARD'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS, THERE IS A GIANT, A WEREWOLF, A MERMAID, A WITCH, AND TWO DANCING ELEPHANTS. IT IS A FANTASTICAL STORY WITH MANY FANTASTICAL CHARACTERS AND ALL PORTRAYED MASTERFULLY.

THE MUSIC IN THE SHOW IS MEMORABLE. KUDOS TO JOEL NISBETT FOR HIS EXCELLENT MUSICAL DIRECTION. THE CAST IS WELL COACHED IN THEIR VOCALS AND THE PIT ORCHESTRA WHICH IS LOCATED IN A SMALL OFF-STAGE ROOM IS AS PROFESSIONAL AS ANY I HAVE HEARD. THE LOGISTICS SEEM OVERWHELMING TO ME BUT THE ORCHESTRA NEVER MISSES A BEAT.

THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THIS PRODUCTION ARE WONDROUS TO BEHOLD. AN INCREDIBLE SET DESIGN THAT TAKES US FROM A SMALL ALABAMA TOWN TO A CIRCUS UNDER THE BIG TOP, TO A SHORELINE WITH A BEAUTIFUL MERMAID. THE SET IS DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE QUICK SCENE CHANGES FROM THE ORDINARY INTERIOR OF A BEDROOM TO THE FANTASY WORLD OF A WITCH AND HER ENSEMBLE IN THE DEEP ALABAMA SWAMPLAND.

THE COSTUMES ARE SIMPLY INCREDIBLE. FROM HUGE ELEPHANT RUMPS TO A TEN FOOT GIANT, A CIRCUS RING MASTER AND A RED, WHITE AND BLUE USO DANCING ENSEMBLE. OH AND DID I MENTION THE MERMAID???

DIRECTED WITH GREAT APLOMB AND IMAGINATION, KIM NISBETT HAS CREATED AND LED THIS AMAZING ENSEMBLE IN THE TELLING OF A TOUCHING STORY ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER AND SON AND HOW THEY FIND COMMON GROUND, TRUTH AND LOVE. YOU MAY NEED TO BRING A HANDKERCHIEF OR TWO TO WIPE AWAY THOSE INEVITABLE TEARS AT THE END OF THE SHOW.

I MUST ALSO MENTION THE WONDERFUL CHOREOGRAPHY BY TRACY MCBRIDE AND GABRIELLE HANSON. THERE IS MODERN, THERE IS WALTZ, THERE IS TAP, WITH JUST A LITTLE "STOMP," THROWN IN FOR GOOD MEASURE. WELL EXECUTED BY ALL, THE DANCING IN THE SHOW IS A JOY TO WATCH.

WHILE THERE ARE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NOVEL, THE FILM AND THE STAGE MUSICAL, THE STORY IS, AS TIM BURTON, THE FILM DIRECTOR SAYS, "ABOUT WHAT IS REAL AND WHAT'S FANTASTIC, WHAT'S TRUE AND WHAT IS NOT TRUE, WHAT'S PARTIALLY TRUE, AND HOW, IN THE END, IT'S ALL TRUE."

IF YOU LOVE THEATRE AS MUCH AS I, YOU CANNOT LET THIS OPPORTUNITY PASS. THIS IS STORYTELLING AT ITS BEST. A WONDERFUL SCRIPT WITH GREAT CHARACTERS, BEAUTIFUL MUSIC, OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCES FROM ACTORS AND MUSICIANS ALIKE, STUNNING SET DESIGNS AND COSTUMES, GREAT DIRECTION AND CHOREOGRAPHY WITH REAL ATTENTION TO THE SMALLEST DETAIL.

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A BIG FAN OF FINE LINEN DRAMA BECAUSE THEY ARE ALWAYS ABLE TO TRANSLATE THEIR PASSION FOR THEATRE INTO AMAZING STORYTELLING ON STAGE.

THE SHOW OPENS ON THURSDAY, APRIL 16 AT THE CEDAR STREET PLAYHOUSE (HOME OF OZARK ACTORS THEATRE) AND RUNS THROUGH SATURDAY APRIL 25. GO TO WWW.FINELINENDRAMA.COM TO RESERVE YOUR TICKETS. DO IT SOON AS POSSIBLE, TICKETS ARE SURE TO SELL FAST WHEN WORD GETS OUT ABOUT THIS MAGICAL, FANTASTICAL, WONDERFUL MUSICAL.