

A FINELY WOVEN TALE

Lane Community College presents *Charlotte's Web*

Terrific!" "Radiant!" "Humble!" Any of these web-woven words can be used to describe E.B. White's timeless story of a spider who saves her friend Wilbur with a few, well-chosen adjectives. For decades readers have fallen in love with the thoughtful little pig as he negotiates a barnyard full of opinionated critters and kind-hearted humans who have every intention of eating him.

Director Sparky J. Roberts crafts a high-energy play full of humor and action. She sets the scene with slide projections and short video clips, then the scrim rises to reveal a massive barn interior with ladders, hale bales and plenty of nooks and crannies for the characters to play through. Joseph Robinette's script neatly transfers the story to stage and has the honor of being approved by White himself.

The animals clearly steal the show. From shuddering sheep to strutting geese, a lot of work obviously went into the physical performance. Nick Caisse's Templeton is half break dancer, half con artist and all rat. Talia Barnes is an elegant Charlotte the spider. Ben Buchanan genuinely expresses Wilbur's youthful curiosity and open-hearted adoration of his friends. He really is "some pig!"

Those cast as humans have tougher jobs, as they serve more as a chorus than characters. John Arredondo receives laughs as Lurvy the farmhand.

Roberts directs this play with an eye to her adult audience as well. She cast several U.S. military veterans and subtly highlights their contributions to society throughout the production. While *Charlotte's Web* is by no means an

allegory for war, a connection can be made in Charlotte's sacrifice for her dear friend Wilbur. The production is set in the 1950s, with music and costuming. The nostalgia is a touch heavy, as the '50s were a time of innocence and idealism for only a select few, and putting a timeless story in an overly stylized period is jarring.

This play should be packed with children. My 9-year-old co-reviewer Owen was enthralled. But press materials say, "Because of the show's length (90 minutes with an intermission) and emotional content, children must be at least eight years old to attend the performances, no exceptions."

Staging a great adaptation of a beloved children's book and not allowing ... children? Wrong. Younger children, like all of us, can see that there is suffering in the world. Since it is impossible keep our children from feeling pain, it is downright unethical to deny them access to arts that help all of us humans make sense of the world. *Charlotte's Web* is beautiful precisely because it deals with the cycle of life and death. While the show is not for toddlers, any thoughtful school-aged child will be entertained and moved by this play. I would have snuck my own 7-year-old in had she not opted to stay home and watch football with her grandma.

Ultimately, E.B. White's message of love and perseverance is one we all could stand reviewing, and LCC presents a colorful, engaging adaptation. ■

Charlotte's Web runs Oct. 4-20 at LCC; \$10, \$5 for children 12 and under.



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