



A MODERN TWIST ON A CANDY CLASSIC

Cottage Theatre stages fun, non-horrifying Willy Wonka

“I hope you don’t start screaming in the middle of it,” my son says, almost as an afterthought as we walk into the theater. Me too.

Roald Dahl’s cautionary tale of greed, gluttony and bad parenting scares the snot out of me, and after two radically unsuccessful attempts by my parents to help me enjoy the film ended in fits of horrified hysteria, we all happily gave up.

And so long as nobody *ever* mentions Gene Wilder I’m perfectly fine.

My children, on the other hand, have both read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* independently as part of this year’s Oregon Battle of the Books. They discuss the motivations of Augustus Gloop, debate how long Violet Beauregarde would be able to chew a particular piece of gum and run around the house pretending to be Oompa

Loompas when they want to annoy their momma.

We took our seats with wildly differing expectations.

Director Janet Rust has taken Dahl’s directive to heart and asks the audience to lean heavily on their own imaginations. Judicious use of projections and sound effects inspired by Rube Goldberg set the mood without overwhelming the senses. Rust’s set is wonderfully creative, suggestive of chocolate rivers rather than threatening with them. Actors are asked to act rather than rely on mechanical devices to help them fly or expand into a blueberry.

The children who make up the majority of the cast are delightful. George Schroeder is a wonderful Charlie Bucket. Mathew Goes, Megan Schneider, Mandy Conforth and Alayna Pearson were perfectly bratty as the golden ticket holders. Several members of the children’s chorus stand out as well. My daughter and I particularly liked the squirrels.

Rust does a nice job of highlighting the adult humor as well. Keith Kessler makes a soulful Grandpa Joe, and Shannon Coltrane is lovely as Mrs. Bucket. Angela Pearson, Karen Warren Snyder and Mandy Conforth exhibit the foibles of bad parenting brilliantly.

Willy Wonka is played as a woman by Tracy Nygard. She is authoritative without that possibly-a-really-creepy-dictator feel. In short, she seems exactly like the sort of oddball genius that could create a candy empire.

This adaptation of the story has been updated. Mike Teevee (played as Mika in this production by Megan Schneider) has added cell phones and a game boy to his addiction, with his mother trailing along, texting constantly. I enjoyed the updates and found them funny but my purist son took issue with the changes.

Rarely do my children and I agree on the worth of a play, yet this was the first of many, many shows that we’ve been to as a family where we all sat spellbound. *Willy Wonka* truly is a show for the whole family. ■

Willy Wonka runs 8 pm, Fridays and Saturdays and 2:30 pm, Sundays through Dec. 23, at the Cottage Theatre, \$16-\$21.

CHRONIC COMEDY FOR A CAUSE

Comedian Ngaio Bealum hashes through ganja giggles and medical Mary Jane

Question: How many stoners does it take to screw in a lightbulb? Answer: Ask Ngaio Bealum.

Bealum, perhaps the Northwest’s premiere perpetrator of high-times comedy, is headlining the 8 pm Thursday, Dec. 6, “Cannabis Comedy Night” at WOW Hall, a fundraiser and evening of huffs and hee-haws sponsored by Northwest Alternative Health, an outfit supporting the rights of patients to get their Oregon medical marijuana cards.

According to Bealum, his brand of humor has broad appeal. “The beauty of cannabis culture is that weed is a subculture of every other culture,” says the comic, who’s opened for the likes of Dave Chappelle and Doug Benson.

It does happen, Bealum admits, that some folks get so high they’re more confused than amused by the punch lines. “A blunt or two usually doesn’t knock people out,” he says, “but every once in a while it seems like the whole crowd is overmedicated on edibles and has a hard time paying attention. The thing is, you have to keep stoners interested, or they lose focus.”

Bealum says that the recent legalization of marijuana in Washington state is “awesome,” and he has high hopes that Oregon and California will follow suit eventually. “Weed should be legal,” he says. “We are finally starting to reach the turning point in the war against the War on Some Drugs. Taxing and regulating marijuana not only saves the state money, it generates income and jobs. Local, sustainable jobs,” Bealum adds. ■

