

Swamp girl outsmarts Machiavellian mom

'Once Upon a Mattress' Review

BY BURNEY GARELICK

Rather than enter the castle across the drawbridge like a normal visitor, Princess Winnifred the Woebegone, from the distant dismal swamp, swims the moat, the quickest way to apply for the princess position and acquire the Happily Ever After everyone always talks about.

It's a spectacular entrance in this classic Broadway musical comedy, "Once Upon A Mattress," debuting in 1959 on the Great White Way, revived countless times on stage and adapted for the big screen.

Comic genius Carol Burnett first nailed the role of Winnifred and, about 50 years later, she grew into the role of Queen Aggravain in this wacky story of love and marriage and mothers and sons, but no psychology, politics, or socio-economic overtones are embedded under the mattress.

The show's witty words and saucy score sparkle with the magic of Broadway.

Suitable for kids of all ages,

CROW (Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops), Florence's youth theater, captured the show's laughter and song with uncommon expertise.

The April 10 to 12 production at the Florence Events Center was brilliant — including four dozen kids talented beyond their years, uncomplicated yet evocative castle sets, a mile-high stack of mattresses, colorful and fanciful costumes and meticulously coordinated choreography.

Extraordinary recorded music complemented the actors and maintained high-octane energy for a breezy run of about two hours.

Directed by professional pedigreed performers Melanie Heard and Jason Wood, the CROW kids got it. Like perceptive princes and princesses able to sense the pestilence of the pea, the CROW kids understand the elements of theater and what makes a great show.

While every member of the company, including the seven tiny telegrammers, is to be applauded, certain actors must be singularly acknowledged.

Hilarious Tristin Reber must have channeled Carol Burnett to create the role of Queen Aggravain. The aggravating queen is the prospective mother-in-law from hell, unwilling to

approve any woman to marry her son, Prince Dauntless, played by Cameron Utz.

Many women audition for the role of Dauntless's princess, taking arduous tests and failing according to the Queen's command. Mother knows best at any cost, without regard for the kingdom's lords and ladies anxious to marry but unable to tie their knots until Prince Dauntless marries.

His name implies he is fearless and brave, and he is amiable and affable, but Prince Dauntless is neither fearless nor brave. He is, however, a good, obedient son. He hopes his mother will find him a princess, but he doesn't push the envelope or make demands.

Utz carried the role with natural comic flair, singing with boundless enthusiasm, dancing with disarming delight, falling to his knees to plead with his mom, and cautiously falling in love with Princess Winnifred.

Though she sings the "Shy" song, Fred, as Princess Winnifred likes to be called, is no shrinking violet. She's fearless and brave and more than equal to every man and woman; she sings, dances, drinks and lifts weights without peer.

Paula Garcia was a perfect fit, never missing a beat and projecting a wide-ranging, art-

iculate voice and nifty improvisational skills when necessary. Those falling bloomers in the Saturday afternoon performance looked like a scripted act!

As for the King's speech, it wasn't. The Silent King had been muted by his domineering, hen-pecking wife, like a hawk who duct-taped his mouth and turned him into a mouse.

Kristopher Keppol as the king was very funny, signing and gesturing a song with his pals, the plucking Minstrel and the tumbling Jester, and later signing "The Man To Man Talk" with his bridegroom son, Prince Dauntless, who was finally en route to the altar.

Sir Harry and Lady Larken, the serious young lovers itching to marry, provided a sweet contrast to Dauntless and Fred.

Had there been any dragons to slay, Sir Harry would have been the man.

Timothy Jones and Hannah Bartlett were picture-perfect sweethearts; all that was missing was a balcony and a soliloquy. Jones's dreamy, passionate voice was noted with pleasure.

"Once Upon A Mattress" was as much fun in 2015 as it was in 1959. Great Broadway shows weather well.

The future of theater is in capable hands with CROW,

especially since the organization has just purchased its own roost in Florence.

As time goes by, the CROWs will fly away to other stages,

but new CROWs will take their places because the show must go on.

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Community Chorus awards three scholarships

On March 3, Siuslaw High School students auditioned in front of adjudicators Laura Merz, Crystal Farnsworth, Sandy Vaccaro and Jan Kinslow as a requirement to receive a Community Chorus of Florence Oregon scholarship.

Two senior students, Elizabeth Wartnik and David Johnston, were awarded \$1,000 each to be used to further their music education.

Wartnik plans to attend George Fox University, where she will major in vocal performance and music composition. She hopes to continue her education in a graduate program at the University of Oregon and prepare for a career teaching vocal performance and composition.

Johnston will be attending the University of Oregon, where he will major in music and dance. He plans a career in

vocal music and choral conducting.

Wartnik and Johnston will be singing solos at the next Community Chorus concert.

Junior student Nikita Williams will receive \$500 toward her tuition at a music camp such as the Bach Festival.

Each spring, the Community Chorus offers scholarships to area students who will be pursuing higher education in the vocal arts.

The Community Chorus Concert will be held on Sunday, May 3, at 2 p.m., at the Florence Event Center (FEC).

The Flotones will make a special guest appearance and the Siuslaw Children's Choir will debut at the evening's Hooray for Hollywood concert.

Tickets for adults can be purchased for \$15 at the FEC, 715 Quince St., or by calling 541-997-1994. There is no charge for children under age 18.

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