

# Seussical the Musical

By Caitlyn May  
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"Max. We've got people."

The Grinch doesn't play a big part in Seussical but he lives up to the hype as a curmudgeon warning audience members to silence their phones, keeps their snacks quiet and pay attention to the action on stage. And honestly, it's not hard. For just under two hours charters from the Jungle of Nool and Whoville bounce around to the familiar stories of Horton Hears a Who, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Cat in the Hat and a crowd of other Seuss classics.

Tony Rust ushers the plot along from scene-to-scene as a misheveled Cat in the Hat and while misheveled may not be a word, it describes the aloof, scruffy and slightly unhinged portrayal given by Rust and since we're talking Seuss--the grandson of word invention begotten by father Shakespeare--it's acceptable in this instance to make up words.

It's something the audience might find itself doing as cast members find themselves competing with the live band in some instances. The result being that those unfamiliar with the lyrics may become acquainted with the story at show's end but will by no means reach a "millennial singing along to Hamilton" level of familiarity. The acoustic issues, however, may be an opening night hiccup. Darcy Rust, in her dream role of JoJo may have been too enthusiastic with her friends that afternoon, she said. And while some normal teenage shouting may have had her competing with the band, in the quiet moments of "Anything's Possible" and "Alone in the Universe" she shines, making it clear that, absent lunchroom chat sessions at top volume, she'll be just fine for the run of the show.

Rust is paired with Mark VanBeever in his second turn as Horton the Elephant. He's the guy to beat. His ability to pack a toddler's innocence and loyalty into a frame that jokingly struggles to climb into a tree, belongs on a much bigger stage. He makes due with the intimate venue at Cottage Theatre though, and connects with kids in the front row, his voice stretching and reaching to those in the back of the theatre.

Joel Ibanez and Brittany Drier lead a pack of Whos as the mayor and his wife. If Ibanez gives a hurried and practiced frazzle of a performance as the newly elected, under the spotlight mayor than Drier provides the quiet worry and stable force to guide him as the pair brace for the war against butter. Or rather, the placement of butter. It doesn't hurt that the Who bunch is also home to the cutest, tiniest members of the troupe: Audriahna Jones as Cindy Lou Who, Zoe Goings and Nicole Wilhour. (They do great and don't forget any of their lines).

Autumn Carter squares off with Madison Baker for vocal powerhouse. Carter, a senior at the University of Oregon, plays Mayzie, a bird who anyone in the audience who has attended high school will recognize as "that girl." If you don't, you may have been that girl and should take note of how Mayzie's actions affected other people and then jump on Facebook and start issuing apologies to old classmates. We don't hold that against Carter though. In fact, she's convincing in the role and



PHOTO BY EMILY BLY

Mark VanBeever is a highlight of Cottage Theatre's production of Seussical. The show runs through Dec. 23.

sort of makes you feel bad for that girl. All she wants is a vacation. Don't we all? Raising kids is hard. Right? In a society obsessed with appearance, who can blame a girl for a little nip and tuck? Is that a reason to hate Mayzie? No, but she really shouldn't have left Horton to hatch her egg. Or Baker's Gertrude to save him. Not that she minded. Nor should the audience mind the time they get to spend listening to Baker give a synopsis of how she found Horton. It just means more Baker and in a community theatre, any time an audience gets to hear a voice like hers, it should soak up the minutes.

Director Keith Kessler does a good job of managing such a large cast. In a show that can easily descend into chaos given the premise, the cast and the costume, Seussical leaps over those hazards and lands on its feet as entertaining and maybe a little magical. It's certainly enough to bring audiences down the Interstate-5 from Eugene to Cottage Grove.

Seussical the Musical is on stage at Cottage Theatre now through Dec. 23. Tickets at \$25 for adults and \$15 for children aged six to 18. For more information, please visit cottagetheatre.org.

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