

Cautionary Tales For Children — Carnegie 18

Drew Lane

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<file:///Volumes/COMPANY/COMMUNICATIONS/PUBLICITY/2012/Cautionary%20Tales/ARTICLES%20reviews/AussieTheatre.webarchive>



Cautionary Tales For Children was presented as part of the Arts Centre's Carnegie18 *New Music Theatre Series*. I arrived early and sat in the foyer of the Fairfax Studio watching as streams of children and their parents came in; this was opening night and the 6.30pm timeslot was perfect for families to see theatre.

Once seated, the audience is presented with a simple set — a time machine — and a piano on stage. Lights down and the time machine “arrives” with Roger (Bert Labonte) emerging from it. Soon, the rest of his crew — Steven (a lovable doofus played by composer/pianist Mark Jones), Sophie (in love with Roger and frogs, and quirkily played by Christen O’Leary), and the



slightly-psychotic Helen (expertly characterized by Rosemarie Harris) — exit from the machine. We soon learn that these time-traveling explorers are here to make all children “be good”, by telling them stories to scare them into submission.

The presentation was excellent; fast-paced and engaging, the show used song, audience participation, and the improvisational talents of cast members (particularly on the part of Labonte) to work around any unexpected audience responses. The songs are clever, and each musical style is appropriately matched to its central theme and character. The only song I felt that lacked was “George”, as it was the one point where the show dragged and lost its intense sense of fun.

CTFC is a work-in-progress, as are all presentations at Carnegie18, and are limited to 45 minutes with 10 minute Q and A session afterwards. This means that some sections of the musical are omitted or brushed over. Interestingly, this length seemed perfect for *CTFC*, and particularly for the audience it is aimed at (upper primary school children and their families). The wordiness of the script and lyrics somewhat of a concern (due to the target demographic); some of the language may fly over the heads of the intended audience. I do realise that the original source text limits the flexibility of the language but a less dense version may be something to consider, especially where the script is concerned. Also, there wasn't an “opening number” as such, and the first main song arrived some 10 minutes into the piece. Perhaps there needs to be a linking musical theme (used as part of the “moral” section of the stories?) to help join the whole piece together.

However, other than these minor points, *Cautionary Tales* is a very funny and wickedly entertaining performance for children and adults alike. Get along and see it while you can!