

Keeton Theatre delivers delightfully silly 'Seussical'

Amy Stumpfl 1:58 p.m. CDT July 18, 2014



(Photo: Submitted)

Theater review

With goofy rhymes and colorful characters, Dr. Seuss has long been a favorite among youngsters and parents. And just as these beloved books provide a worthy primer for beginning readers, "Seussical the Musical" offers an engaging introduction to theater — for both aspiring artists and young audiences.

Featuring music by Stephen Flaherty and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, "Seussical" brings together familiar story lines from a number of Dr. Seuss classics, including "Horton Hears a Who!" and "The One Feather Tail of Gertrude McFuzz." Though short-lived on Broadway, "Seussical" quickly established itself as a favorite among community theaters and schools.

And why not? As Larry Keeton Theatre's current production demonstrates, "Seussical" offers a fine showcase for both stage veterans and kids from Keeton's Summer Theatre Camp. Directed by Jamie London and Ginger Newman, "Seussical" is very much an ensemble piece, but this staging benefits from strong casting in

key roles.

In fact, Justin Boyd may be the coolest cat you'll ever see as the iconic Cat in the Hat. He sets the tone early with the catchy "Oh, the Things You Can Think!" Boyd's Cat serves up wild-eyed narration and some hilarious asides — including a spot-on Louis Armstrong. Such humor may be lost on youngsters, but they surely appreciate Boyd's boundless energy and nonstop antics.

Newcomer Jenny Norris Light makes a memorable debut as the hapless Gertrude McFuzz. Light has a gorgeous voice, but it's her acting that really stands out in "The One Feather Tail of Miss Gertrude McFuzz" and "Notice Me, Horton."

Young Stella London continues to spread her wings as a performer, bringing surprising depth to the role of JoJo — a young Who with a vivid imagination. Her delivery of "It's Possible" and "Alone in the Universe" is especially strong.

Larry Jones evokes much sympathy as Horton the Elephant, and Gia Nappo is appropriately sassy as Mayzie La Bird. Other standouts include Josh Waldrep as General Schmitz, Santayana Harris as Sour Kangaroo, and real-life couple John and Kat Boettcher as Mr. and Mrs. Mayor of Whoville.

The sound was a bit muddled in some of the big numbers opening night. And with so many people on stage, there are moments where the action gets clunky. But Jamie London's choreography is charming, and generally well-executed. "It's Possible" is particularly successful, effectively transforming JoJo's bath time into a dreamy underwater scene — with adorable members of the Youth Ensemble doubling as fish and jellyfish.

Amy Slade's set draws us into the story with whimsical designs, and Tanis Westbrook's colorful costumes play into the story's circus-like atmosphere.

As with Dr. Seuss' books, "Seussical" is a tribute to all things silly. But it also has plenty to say about friendship, loyalty and imagination — wonderful themes for young audiences.

If you go

What: The Larry Keeton Theatre presents "Seussical the Musical"

When: Through July 27. Performances at 7 p.m. (dinner seating at 5:45 p.m.) Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. (seating at 12:45 p.m.)

Where: 108 Donelson Pike (in the FiftyForward Donelson Station building)

Tickets: \$15-\$28

Contact: [thelarrykeetontheatre.org](http://www.thelarrykeetontheatre.org) (<http://www.thelarrykeetontheatre.org/>) or 615-883-8375

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