

Little Donkey full of Dutch treats

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Theatre Review

By Kevin Prokosh

Four stars out of five

YOU can count on Amsterdam's Theatre Terra to bring local youngsters a stage full of Dutch treats when it visits the Manitoba Theatre for Young People.

Less than a year after performing the musical *Frog and his Friends*, the globe-trotting company returns with *Little Donkey*, a sweet, tune-filled puppet show about a forest full of creatures trying to recover from a powerful windstorm. The adventure story by kids' author Rindert Kromhout of The Netherlands achieves simple truths about friendship but it is the visual presentation that stands out.



It is the perspective that the four animator/actors constantly play with that gives the colourful, hour-long musical its surprising size. After his mother's laundry house is flattened, Little Donkey and his buddies come to the rescue to help her find her missing washing. Most importantly, they must locate a wayward sock belonging to Marabou, an imposing bird whose three-metre-high spindly legs are all that can be seen when it first walks on stage.

Director Wilma Hoornstra plays on children's natural fears by making them think Marabou is some kind of huge ogre, by supplying him with a booming voice and a determined resolve to get his socks back. Marabou's long, sharp beak and worm-like neck make him just unsettling enough to those at the lower end of the three- to eight-year-old target audience.

Worried for his mother, Little Donkey goes off on his own to meet the feared Marabou and as he moves through mountains, different sized puppets appear to suggest great distance. Of course, Marabou proves not to be who he appears and the Little Donkey discovers not only the missing sock but an unlikely pal.

Little Donkey is not musically stingy with 11 songs but only a couple hit the mark. In the bouncy *Stockings*, Marabou warns that his stocking better be found, "or else it will be shocking." Some of the youngsters who took in a school show earlier this week got a kick out of the rhyming of shoe with pooh.

The hard-working cast of Sven Polak, Ruth Kahmann, Babbe Groenhagen and Dick Feld literally had their hands full, sometimes manually manipulating two life-sized puppets and singing at the same time. Feld is particularly fun as Marabou and Groenhagen as Party Pig, a true party animal who speaks like Eeyore.

While everyone loves a hero, Marabou was the one getting all the post-performance attention as kids were happy he turned out to be more like Big Bird than a big beast.

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