

Clever musical brings Seuss to spectacular life

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By Kevin Prokosh

AFTER all those years stuck on a page, Dr. Seuss's storybook characters came alive on the stage.

Seussical, the Manitoba Theatre for Young People musical, brings alive the likes of the Cat in the Hat, Horton the Elephant and a hill of Whos in a whirling blur of colour and continuous motion.

The original songs by the American composing team of Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens are fun but they are no match for the good doctor's beloved verse that enchants with sense and nonsense. Kids who came to the theatre reciting his famous rhymes will exit doing the same and not humming any of show's tunes.

What the excited children will remember is seeing some of their favourite Seuss characters live. The sight of Cat in the Hat's oversized candy-cane coloured striped headgear sitting alone on the MTYP stage prior to a recent school performance had one impatient kindergarten girl asking repeatedly, "When is the Cat in the Hat coming?" The musical master of mischief soon appears to narrate the heart-warming story of Horton, the put-upon pachyderm, who tries to save a small world and keep an egg warm. Soon the stage is full of a singing and dancing chorus line of bird girls, Whos and monkey boys.

Seussical celebrates the triumph of the imagination that the design team assembled by director Robb Paterson has taken to heart. Again and again a viewer is struck by the cleverness and cheek sewn subtly into the 70-minute Seuss spectacular.

Set master Brian Perchaluk wraps Horton & Co. inside a Seuss circus world where nothing is as it appears. Orange pylons are used as megaphones, an ironing board doubles as a piano and an upside-down umbrella makes a handy nest. Leanne Foley's loopy costumes earn the Seuss seal of approval.

The energetic 12-member cast is headed by Jim Soper, as Horton, who hears the faint cries for help from a bunch of microscopic Whos living on a tiny speck of dust. Soper, bald except for a shock of pink hair standing on his head, brings a touching sense of compassion to Horton, who stands up to withering criticism and does the right thing.

It's the birds soar in *Seussical*, especially Jennifer Lyon as the glam girl Mayzie and Debbie Maslowsky as the feather-challenged Gertrude. Lyon is in fine voice as the flighty, irresponsible mom who hands off her egg when it puts a crimp in her partying. Maslowsky again exhibits her excellent comic chops as the lovesick bird next door carrying a torch for Horton. Her *Notice Me, Horton* and *All For You* are highlights.

Kimberley Rampersad does an impressive soulful turn as the Sour Kangaroo. She had the adults in the audience chuckling when she punctuated her mockery of Horton with the Aretha Franklin-like whoop R-E-S-P-E-C-K. Geoffrey Tyler earns a doff of the hat for his cat. Zach Raizman, 14, does nice work as the think-happy Jojo, most prominently in *Alone in the Universe*.

You can't lose-ical with this musical called *Seussical*.

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