

Published December 11th, 2019

Cinderella at Town Hall Theatre for the holiday, an idiosyncratic fairytale

By *Sophie Braccini*



Cinderella production four: Pictured: Henry Halkyard and Lindsay Kathryn Ford in "Cinderella: A Fairytale." Photo Jay Yamada

Humor, charm and wacky energy characterize the Brothers Grimm fairy tale staged by Town Hall Theatre this December. No damsel in distress, but a lovely young woman standing for herself. No prince rescuing the desperate, but a young man in search of authenticity and love. No fairy godmother, but the power of nature symbolized by birds giving those who understand it strength, and those who neglect it punishment. And above all a dynamic and super fun group of actors who give it all to make this play a very witty and memorable production. Disney it is not.

"Cinderella: A Fairytale," devised by Sally Cookson and Adam Peck, takes on the bias that Ella (Cinder-Ella) is not just a sweet and innocent girl, she has knowledge - of birds and the natural world - and power. She can be astute, she challenges the hardship that has fallen upon to her; in essence, she is a fighter. This adaptation slightly warps the other characters as well, creating subtle discrepancies between memories we all have of

the tale and what is presented here. This provides for tremendous amusement opportunities. Instead of two stepsisters you get a stepsister and a stepbrother; instead of a heroic prince you get a somewhat nerdy and awkward bird watcher.

These twists are played for maximum effect through Clive Worsley's direction. Worsley previously served as the artistic director at Town Hall and left in 2013 to direct the education program at Cal Shakes. He says that his return as the play's director was a treat and he added that he particularly loved that the main character uses her own power to transform herself, which is more fitting to our times. He also saw in that play an appeal to recognize and respect the power of nature.

Worsley mentioned that he had requested Dennis Markam to be in the cast. The mature and very versatile actor, who plays both the father and stepmother, is indeed at his best. Many newcomers were cast in the play with great acumen: Lyndsay Kathryn Ford as Ella is lovely, strong, full of youthful energy, and has an excellent voice to carry the charming tunes that are interspersed in the play; Henry Halkyard as the prince lets out a spontaneity in wackiness and awkwardness that works very well; Sarah-Jean Bartky is a completely hilarious and over-the-top stepsister, and she is very well matched by Marshall Scott who plays the stepbrother, sometimes a bully, and sometimes vulnerable and touching; Mikah Kavita as the queen is indeed magnificent and royal. The charming ensemble of the birds is played by five young actors ages 10-17 who never miss a beat. They flutter around the stage, sing, dance, and act with excellent professionalism.

Now be prepared, there is an element of cruelty in the original story alongside the whimsical reference to birds and nature, and the Cookson and Peck adaptation is true to that as well. Yet Markham's superb acting and having him cast as both the father and stepmother creates the distance that makes the cruelty more funny than shocking.

"Cinderella: A Fairytale" runs through Dec. 21 at Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School St. in Lafayette. For tickets and information, visit www.townhalltheatre.com

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[back](#)

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