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Maiden gets modern

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Montgomery Advertiser - Montgomery, Ala.

Subjects: Children & youth; Theater

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Date: Jan 20, 2002

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ASF's 'Cinderella' no fairy tale romance

Once upon a time, Cinderella was a helpless girl, who dreamed her prince would come to her rescue.

But all that wimpy, helpless stuff is in the past. Today's Cinderella isn't so helpless. In fact, in the production of "Cinderella" presented by Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Carol Delk Thompson Children's Theatre, she's not even interested in meeting the prince.

"This is a modern approach to an old story, but there are a lot of elements still there -- magic and the idea that goodness and love will be rewarded," director Greta Lambert said.

It opens Friday and runs through Feb. 24. However, the fairy tale seems to be a Montgomery area favorite because all the shows -- including the three additions -- are sold out.

This production features ASF's Graduate Company, made up of the theater's second-year master of fine arts students.

Given the opportunity to portray the title character, Christina Traister said, "This is one of those roles that come around once in a lifetime."

And this particular production offers a great message for children, she said.

"It's great to have little girls see this -- you can empower yourself, be seen as an individual," Traister said. "You don't have to rely on anyone else."

When Cinderella meets Prince Adrian, portrayed by Peter Macklin, she mistakes him for his attendant, who is left holding the prince's cloak.

Lambert said, "The element that draws the two of them together is their love of animals -- especially one animal. And that is what drew me to this script."

Another interesting twist for Macklin is the way the story not only tracks Cinderella but the prince's coming of age.

"They get their own voices separately and together," he said.

Lambert describes the prince as a young rebel.

"He is expected to take his role in the kingdom, marry someone who will help him, be courageous and slay dragons," the director said. "But you can see his reign will be characterized by kindness, and he will create his own way of ruling."

Although Cinderella doesn't realize he is the prince, she falls in love.

Traister said she falls for the man -- not the title, which is another important lesson for children.

Of course, the production includes Cinderella's stepsisters and her stepmother -- who is not so much wicked as misunderstood, said Amy Louise Sebelius, who portrays Mala, Cinderella's stepmother.

"The most interesting thing for me about this play is she (Mala) is not presented as just a two-dimensional character," Sebelius said. "By the end of the play, she has gone on her own journey. She thinks she has everything at the beginning and finds she has nothing."

Sebelius and the rest of the cast are thrilled to be a part of the children's theater program.

"I adore performing for children," said Sebelius, who started in children's theater at 15. "The program they have here in the winter slot is one of the most important things they can do. So many children in the surrounding communities don't get to see theater."

Macklin said it is an honor to introduce youngsters to the art, and hearing their reactions will be a treat.

Nine-year-old Ashton Moody, who already loves the theater, hopes to see "Cinderella."

"The theater is lots of fun and exciting," he said. "It gives you a picture of a person's life."

This Bear Exploration Center fourth-grader is an experienced audience member as well as an actor. He was the changing boy in ASF's 2000 production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and was Tiny Tim in ASF's 2001 production of "A Christmas Carol."

In theater, the world of imagination is brought to life, Ashton said.

Lambert said children have wonderful imaginations, and it is so important to encourage young people to develop an interest in theater.

ASF's version of "Cinderella," she hopes, will do just that -- especially with the surprises that are planned.

"I don't want to give everything away," she said. "Everyone will just have to wait and see."

WANT TO GO?

What: The Alabama Shakespeare

Festival's Carol Delk Thompson production of 'Cinderella,' performed by the Graduate Company

When: Opens at 8 p.m. Friday and runs through Feb. 24

Where: Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Octagon

Cost: All shows are sold out, and only stand-by tickets may become available; tickets are \$15

Information: 271-5353

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