

Child's Play

Do you remember living free of responsibility? Without any distractions from the goal of personal fulfillment? For most of us that time ended around five years of age. Luckily, adults like French author Antoine de Saint-Exupery remember what life is like for a child. His classic novel, *The Little Prince*, was adapted for the stage by David Zucker. Under the direction of John Hill, Bas Bleu Theatre Company has brought it to Fort Collins. Not usually known for producing plays for "the whole family," Bas Bleu brings *The Little Prince* to life for both children and veteran theater patrons.

The stage adaptation is faithful to the novel's text; both are narrated by the Aviator who has crashed his plane in the Sahara Desert where he met the Little Prince. He has a natural kinship with the boy as they have a common enemy: Grownups. The Aviator is still bitter over their inability to decipher the drawings he made as a child while the Little Prince just finds them silly. Still, the Aviator cannot ignore that he is, in fact, a grownup. He is annoyed when the boy innocently laughs at the idea of



It's all fun and games for the Little Prince.

him falling from the sky because he "likes his misfortune to be taken seriously." Another grownup truth is that the Aviator has a limited water supply and will eventually die if he does not escape the desert. Erik McAllister plays the Aviator with sensitivity and playfulness, relating to children without forfeiting his maturity.

The main subject of the play is the Little Prince's perception of the world. Young Brittany Heileman is the ideal choice to play the role. She looks the part with her quizzical eyes and flyaway hair, and most boys young enough to play the Little Prince would have a tough time playing this demanding role. In a previous Bas Bleu production, *Tongue of a Bird*, Heileman successfully brought a cheerful childlike quality to her role as the bloody ghost of a dead girl. So she's certainly up to the task of capturing the innocent wisdom of the Little Prince. Relentless in his questioning of things that make no sense, Heileman's Little Prince shows us plainly that grownups

are odd. This is made clear by the inhabitants of the series of planets that the Little Prince visits before he travels to the Sahara.

An ensemble cast plays all of the various roles within the play. Most important to the Little Prince is the Rose. Played by Birch Norlander-McCarty, the Rose is both innocent and seductive. She is the only beautiful thing on his small planet and, for now, the Little Prince loves her platonically but, should he ever grow up, his love will clearly become romantic. With her always on his mind, the Little Prince goes on a magical journey where he meets many confounding grownups.

The Little Prince's youth demands that everything be questioned and he continually meets grownups with incomprehensible problems and habits. He meets a businessman who has time for absolutely nothing but counting stars which he claims to own and a drunkard who drinks in order to forget that he drinks. An encounter with a man on

a planet where each day lasts only one minute is a clear indictment of the fast pace of modern society. The man is perpetually exhausted because he must light and extinguish a lamp every minute to mark the passage of days and has no time to sleep.

The Little Prince suffers by hovering between children's and adult theater. Ideally it should be visually interesting enough for children and cerebral enough for adults but it falls short on both fronts. The ambiguity is highlighted by the different styles employed by the cast members. For instance Molly McGuire as the Snake assaults the Little Prince with an overabundance of sexual prowess; contrarily Shane Curtiss Miller plays all his roles like a Sesame Street character.

The artistic design is appropriately otherworldly and an ethereal mood is created, but it is without bedazzlement. Bas Bleu's new cavernous space could have been put to better use. The mimed walking is overdone and unnecessary in such a large room.

Despite great acting by Heileman and McAllister the show lacks the vigor usually present at Bas Bleu. This production is successful in representing the original novel's mood and message that life is far better without unnecessary complications. *The Little Prince* onstage, however, seems to beg for more embellishment than was applied here. **W**

The Little Prince

Bas Bleu

401 Pine St., Fort Collins

Fridays & Saturdays, 7:30 p.m.

Select Thursdays, 7:30 p.m.

Sundays, 2:30 p.m.

Through Jan. 15

Adults \$17, Seniors \$12, Students \$10

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